How to Create Effective Songs for English Teaching Purposes: An Experiment with Three- to Six-Year-Old Japanese Children

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1. Introduction

In this paper, the power of music as an English educational material is analyzed. The main goal of this paper is to determine what features make a song a successful teaching tool. Two songs were composed and tested with kindergarten pupils. Results were positive and the full experience is explained in detail.

2.1. Multiple Intelligence Theory, Language Aptitude and Meaningful Learning

Gardner's (1983, 1993, 1999, 2006) multiple intelligences theory (MIT), Skehan's (1998) notion of language aptitude, and Ausubel's (1968) meaningful learning theory are the foundation of this study.

Contrary to what was traditionally thought, Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999, 2006) maintains that intelligence is not something single and fixed, but each one of the nine described intelligences is autonomous, changeable, and trainable (Armstrong, 1999). Hence, in a MIT educational context, teachers should offer a wide array of activities to cater to the different types of learners, intelligences, and learning styles. The first conclusion that can be drawn from this theory is that introducing songs in the English class might help strengthening not only the verbal-linguistic and the musical-rhythmic intelligences (Pérez Aldeguer & Leganés Lavall, 2012), but also the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence if movement is involved.

Skehan (1998) affirmed that language aptitude is based on auditory ability, linguistic ability, and memory ability, and then concluded that it is not necessary to have an exceptional intelligence or cognitive ability in order to be an outstanding second language learner. Fonseca Mora & Toscano Fuentes (2012) assert that the use of melodies can help enhancing the listening ability,

the linguistic ability by studying and working around the lyrics, and the memory ability, since music can be a good mnemonic, as explained later in this paper.

Finally, important concepts can be extracted from Ausubel's (1968) meaningful learning theory. First, new knowledge builds upon prior knowledge, so the latter is of major importance. Second, interest development is one of the goals of meaningful learning, as students who are interested generally learn more effectively (Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, Taasoobshirazi, & Mukhopadyay, 2006). Third, providing context to new information contributes to create meaning (Jensen, 1998). Cheung (2001) suggests that "when English activities and exercises are meaningful and interesting to students, they will have an immediate goal to achieve, which will help to develop a longer-term desire to learn" (p. 59). Pérez Aldeguer & Leganés Lavall (2012) highlight the power of music for motivating and developing meaningful and lasting learning. In their research with young children, Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra (2014), maintain that using activities such as music contribute to meaningful learning since they involve "movements, repetitions, and expressions that are engaging for children" (p.12). On that note, both music training and a developed musical intelligence seem to have a positive influence in second or foreign language learning.

2.2.- L1 Acquisition, Prosody and Infant-Directed Speech

Fonseca Mora & Cuenca Villarín (2000) demonstrated how melody plays an important role during the first language acquisition process. According to their research, children use prosodic elements of speech to understand language, especially when the so-called infant directed speech or 'motherese' talk is involved. On top of that, they conducted an experiment and concluded that there is a similarity between the 'motherese' talk and the way English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher talk to their students. In the words of Engh (2013), "it appears that melodic musicality of speech is not only significant to FLA, but to the entire language acquisition process" (p. 117), As a consequence, Fonseca Mora (2000) presented her 'melodic approach', based on the evidence that musicality of speech has an effect on the entire language acquisition process.

2.3.- Language and Music

Fonseca Mora (2000) note the similarities between language and music. First, both are based on the processing of sounds. Secondly, both are used to convey messages. Thirdly, both of them have "intrinsic features in common, such as pitch, volume, prominence, stress, tone, rhythm, and pauses" (p. 147). Finally, both language and music are learnt through exposure. Moreover, several authors such as Sloboda (1989) and Patel (2003) exposed their view on the similarities.

2.4.- Cognitive Science

According to Engh (2013), cognitive research indicates that "language and music have important points of convergence and/or overlap" (p. 115). The neuroimaging data collected suggests that music is handled in the same areas of the brain that language is (Patel, Edward, Ratner, Besson, & Holcomb, 1998), and consequently, music and language could share similar assimilation processes.

2.5.- Sociological Considerations

There are sociological considerations (Engh, 2013) that support the use of music in the EFL classroom. To begin with, songs are believed to reinforce group relationships by promoting a sense of community (Anshel & Kipper, 1988; Storr, 1992; Lems, 1996; Huy Le, 1999; Lake, 2003; Gao, 2008; Fonseca Mora, Tegge, 2018; Vishnevskaia & Zhen Zhou, 2019). Secondly, songs are regarded as a tool for breaking boundaries between students and teachers (Huy Le, 1999; Moradi & Shahrokhi, 2014), between school and home life (Anshel & Kipper, 1988; Storr, 1992; Huy Le, 1999; Lake, 2003; Gao, 2008; Engh, 2013; Vishnevskaia & Zhen Zhou, 2019) and between the various communities that students belong to (Nagy & Herman, 1987). Thirdly, songs are known for conveying Pop Culture and for offering insights into other cultures. There are authors who claim that introducing pop, rock or rap songs into the classroom brings children's interests to the learning spotlight (Hamblin, 1987; Domoney & Harris, 1993; Fonseca Mora, 2000; Plagwitz, 2006; Gértrudix & Gértrudix, 2010; Kuśnierek, 2016). On the other hand, there are authors who defend that music develops the students' cultural competence (Gravenall, 1945; Jolly, 1975; Murphey, 1992, Fomina, 2000; Stansell, 2005; Fonseca Mora, Toscano Fuentes & Wermke, 2011; Engh, 2013; Degrave, 2019).

2.6.- Benefits in second and foreign language acquisition

Krashen's (1982) 'affective filter hypothesis' states that success in second language acquisition is conditioned by high motivation, high self-confidence, and low anxiety.

A review of the bibliography shows that music helps reducing anxiety (Hamblin, 1987; Domoney & Harris, 1993; Cheung, 2001; Plagwitz, 2006; Sayer & Ban, 2014; Kuśnierek, 2016), and increases stimulation, motivation, enjoyment, and participation in the EFL class (Fonseca Mora, 2000; Gértrudix & Gértrudix, 2010; Kuśnierek, 2016). The fact that self-confidence influences language learning has also been argued by Arnold & Fonseca Mora (2004) and it has been described that the use of music contributes to increase confidence in students (Levitin, 2007; Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014).

The use of songs changes the classroom atmosphere. Firstly, it helps students to relax and to improve their attention span and concentration (Nicholson, 1972; Lozanov, 1978; Brewer & Campbell, 1991; Arnold & Fonseca Mora, 2004; Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014; Tegge, 2018; Vishnevskaia & Zhen Zhou, 2019). Secondly, music has been argued to help individuals to socialise and to influence mood (Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Fonseca Mora, Toscano Fuentes, & Wermke, 2011), emotions (Bower, 1970; Jellison, 1976; Beal, 1985; Graham, 1992; Wilcox, 1995; Fomina, 2000; Chou, 2012; Degrave, 2019), sensibility (Fonseca Mora, Toscano Fuentes, & Wermke, 2011) and creativity (Wolff, 2004).

It has been affirmed that songs produce a powerful mnemonic effect on the listeners not only due to their rhythm and music, which includes elements like melody, harmony, tempo, or instrumentation, but also due to their slower presentation rate, rhymes, timing and measurement of sentences in lyrics, linguistic sound patterns, repetition, dance, total physical response, conveyed emotions, or mental imagery suggested to the listener. In other words, music enhances memory and information recalling[i]. Murphey (1990) described the 'stuck-in-my head' phenomenon, which is a hypothesis that describes how 'din' or involuntary mental rehearsal enhances language acquisition.

2.6.1.- Language Specific Skills

Bringing songs into play contributes positively to vocabulary

acquisition (Medina 1990; Schunk, 1999; Stansell, 2005; de Groot, 2006; Brand & Li, 2009; Chou, 2012; Romero, 2017; Tegge, 2018; Degrave, 2019).

Songs provide a good opportunity to work on grammar both implicitly and explicitly, figurative expressions, and stylistic techniques, too (Jolly, 1975; Falioni, 1993; Anton, 2000; Forster, 2006; Engh, 2013; Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014; Kuśnierek, 2016; Piri, 2018; Tegge, 2018; Degrave, 2019).

There are researchers who state that the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) can be improved with music practice (Jolly, 1975; Saricoban & Metin, 2000; Thain, 2010; Fonseca Mora, Toscano Fuentes, & Wermke, 2011; Pérez Aldeguer & Leganés Lavall, 2012). Other researchers have focused their attention on specific skills, such as listening (Leith, 1979; Kanel 1997; Richards, 2001; Slevc & Miyake, 2006; Engh, 2013; Piri, 2018, Degrave, 2019), speaking (Eterno, 1961; Graham, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1994; Wilcox, 1995; Murphy, 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Fichler, 2009; Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014; Fonseca Mora & Martín Pulido, 2015; Vishnevskaia & Zhen Zhou, 2019), pre-reading and reading (Hall, 1952; McDonald, 1975; Campbell, 1998; Toscano Fuentes, 2011; Galicia Moyeda & Zarzosa Escobedo, 2014; Piri, 2018), and writing (Orlova, 2003; Fonseca Mora, Fonseca Mora & Toscano Fuentes, 2012; Degrave, 2019).

In closing, the "use of music and song in the language-learning classroom is both supported theoretically by practicing teachers and grounded in the empirical literature as a benefit to increase linguistic, sociocultural and communicative competencies. From an educational standpoint, music and language not only can, but should be studied together" (Engh, 2013, p.121).

2.7.- Teachers' Beliefs, Attitudes and Opinions towards Music as a Teaching Tool

The pedagogical benefits of music for foreign language learning are either intuitively felt (Engh, 2013) or known by teachers (Pérez Aldeguer & Leganés Lavall, 2012; Engh, 2013; Tse, 2015; Jamoulle, 2017; Piri, 2018; Degrave, 2019). Many of them support this tool but, in spite of this, they do not introduce songs into their lesson plans (See Pérez Aldeguer & Leganés Lavall, 2012; Engh, 2013; Jamoulle, 2017; Degrave, 2019). According to Degrave (2019), there are two main factors that cause this paradox. First, it can be difficult to find appropriate material. Second, many

teachers are unable to support theoretically the decision of using music in the foreign language classroom. Pérez Aldeguer & Leganés Lavall (2012) provide two more motives, which are that foreign language teachers have a lack of musical knowledge and that they do not really know how to use music for teaching purposes. Leaving aside the above, other researchers suggest going one step further. Fonseca Mora & Martín Pulido (2015) and Vishnevskaia & Zhen Zhou (2019) discuss the possibility for a teacher to create their own songs, which leads us to the next section.

2.8.- Creating Songs for English Teaching Purposes: Features of a Good Song

Regarding the songs' content, it should be relevant to the topic covered in class (Abbot, 2002), and "based on the curriculum themes or language structures being taught" (Fisher, 2001, p.47). With respect to the lyrics, if they fit in with the music, are easy to remember, and repetitive (Tegge, 2017), they will make a good resource for learning. On that note, Murphey (1990) analysed a corpus of popular pop song's lyrics readability, and applied Flesch's (1974) readability formula to conclude that the lyrics could be considered 'very easy'. Additionally, Fonseca Mora & Martín Pulido (2015) indicate that language input must be appropriate for the pupils, and by language input they mean Krashen's (1982) notion of comprehensible input. This hypothesis states that people acquire a language by "understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence" (Krashen, 1982, p.21). As to melody, it influences speech intonation memorization and becomes a good mnemonic if it coincides with the speech intonation patterns of the lyrics (Fomina, 2000). On the other hand, melody facilitates memorization when it is compatible with the lyrics phonetically, meaning the number of notes in the melody matches the number of syllables in the lyrics fairly well (Yalch, 1991). In a series of experiments, Wallace (1994) intended to determine what features of a melody are crucial for making learning and remembering lyrics easier. She concluded that in order to learn and recall the lyrics, the melody must be sufficiently assimilated to render information about line and syllable length, chunk text together appropriately, and extract rhythmical information.

Songs for teaching purposes have a slow presentation rate (Piri, 2018), and it has been demonstrated that a slow presentation rate enhances recall both with word lists and with songs (Posner, 1963; Murray, 1968; Kilgour, Jakobson, & Cuddy, 2000). Other characteristics of songs are their high amount of repetition of simple

vocabulary (Murphey, 1990), conversational language, short words and many personal pronouns (Piri, 2018), grammar patterns (see Bartle, 1962; Techmeier, 1969; Abbott, 2002), and their short length (Murphey, 1992). According to Tegge (2017), the fact that songs are brief music creations has three advantages. First, teachers do not have to spend too much time evaluating a song's lyrics. Then, unlike other materials like films, songs can be listened to in full in a lesson. Thirdly, its use allows for doing several exercises around the songs themselves. Moreover, "songs can be listened to and sung several times without becoming boring" (Tegge, 2018, p. 281). Lastly, songs are not only simple and repetitive regarding vocabulary and grammar, but have a simple (Schön, Boyer, Moreno, Besson, Peretz, & Kolinsky, 2008) and repetitive (Forster, 2006; Schön et al., 2008; Tegge, 2018) structure. This means that a typical pop song structure includes an intro, a verse, a chorus, another verse, another chorus, a bridge, a chorus, and an outro. However, songs for teaching purposes like the ones written by Super Simple Songs might have a simpler structure, such as a verse, a chorus, another verse, and a final chorus. All of the aforementioned features allow songs "to be processed easily, efficiently and amusingly" by pupils (Piri, 2018, p.75).

Nevertheless, Wallace (1994) argued that if music is not relatively simple and easy to learn, it will not only be useless as a memory aid, but it will also divert attention away from the text and hamper recall. Kilgur, Jakobson, & Cuddy (2000) pointed out that even pupils with music studies may require several exposures to the melody before it serves as a useful mnemonic.

Regarding the music itself, leading company in English songs for children Super Simple Songs songs were analyzed in terms of melody, chords, instrumentation, and tempo, as they have a reputation for their quality. Later in this paper conclusions about this analysis will be discussed.

2.8.1.- The Use of Imagery

Arnold & Fonseca Mora (2004) assert that "visual elements are especially useful for providing comprehensible and meaningful input for second language learners" (p.126), and pupils themselves consider visual teaching aids as motivating and helpful (Calvert & Tart, 1993; Toscano Fuentes, 2011; Caballero de Valcárcel, 2021). As a consequence, the use of supporting visual elements such as flashcards and videos is highly convenient. Flashcards are mainly used for providing direct meaning to

vocabulary words, but they can also be used in many different listening, speaking, and memory activities such as 'what's missing?', Kim's game, lip reading, telling riddles, or hide and seek. On the other hand, videos are useful and powerful resources for teaching (Sedeño Valdellós, 2002) since nowadays children are hugely interested in technology and multimedia. Pupils follow the instructions that many music videos have, and thus understand and memorize the contents in a more effective way (Vishnevskaia & Zhen Zhou, 2019), since not only the listening but also the visual and physical channels of perception are used. Fonseca Mora & Martín Pulido (2015) identify three factors to bear in mind before selecting a video. First, both music and animation must be appealing for pupils since simple melodies and rhythm, colorful pictures, a familiar topic, movement, and repetition lead to better language acquisition. Second, they must offer a comprehensive input that allows the new learning to conform to prior knowledge. Finally, the vocabulary and grammar points in the video must match the objectives set in the lesson plan.

2.8.2.- Adding Gestures

Contrary to Chomsky's (1965, 1975) linguistic theory that conceives language as an abstract phenomenon of the mind and unrelated to the body, Piaget (1976) argues that first language acquisition is a sensorimotor process, and Macedonia (2014) affirms that the idea of gestures enhancing learning in first and second languages is "robust and well documented" (p.2). Macedonia (2014) explains how this process works for first language: "being language grounded in the body and its actions, mere reading or hearing [words related to sensorial experiences –for example cinnamon–, action words –for example run–, and abstract words –for example sadness–] elicits simulation. Simulation, in turn, induces brain activity in those areas that are activated during physical performance" (pp. 2–3). However, Macedonia (2014) also asserts that further research is needed to better understand how this process works in second languages.

On the other hand, Asher's (1966, 1969) Total Physical Response approach has had a great influence in songs for English teaching purposes. This methodology, consisting in giving commands in second or foreign language to the pupils, is applied when instructions are given both implicitly and explicitly in lyrics.

3.1.- About the Experiment

The research question is *How should a song be in order to encourage and favor English learning at its full potential?*. Three objectives were set to try to answer this question:

- To analyse examples of succesful songs used for English teaching purposes.
- To create songs based on the conclusions derived from the previous analysis.
- To check if these new songs are useful for teaching English vocabulary.

In fact, the songs created for this experiment belong to an educative project called Tiny Chanters Tribe (www.tinychanterstribe.com), which was originally started by the first author. This project aims at teaching English to children between 2 and 6 years old by providing original songs and other original resources to be used around them. The members of Tiny Chanters Tribe are characters called Hari and Ellie.

To begin with this study, thirteen songs by leading company Super Simple Songs (see the list in Appendix) were analysed in terms of topic, lyrics, melody, harmony, tempo, instrumentation, animation, and gestures used, if any. After that, first author composed and produced 'Weather Song' and 'Days of the Week Song'. The final step was to test the songs in real teaching situations.

3.2.- Context and Participants

The experiment was conducted during the 2020-2021 academic year, between December and January (note that the Japanese academic year goes from April to March) at public Iwate University Faculty of Education Kindergarten in Kagano, a neighborhood located in the east of Morioka, Japan. This kindergarten operates on a year-round calendar and had five groups at the time the experiment was conducted: one of three to four-year-old pupils (Momo class, 22 children), two of four to five-year-old pupils (Sakura and Tsubaki, 21 and 21 children), and two of five to six-year-old pupils (Kiku and Tampopo, 23 and 24 children), which makes a total of 111 pupils. After a conversation with the Assistant Principal, it was decided it was better to only teach and refrain from assessing the Momo group pupils because managing an interview with them at such young age could be troublesome. Therefore, from the original number of 111 children who participated in the study, all of the Momo group pupils were dropped due to the aforementioned reason, and 4 other pupils from other groups were dropped due to absence on some of the testing days. In the end, a total of 85 pupils were assessed.

3.3.- Instruments

A few tools were used during this study: 'Weather Song', 'Weather Song' flashcards, 'Days of the Week Song', 'Days of the Week Song' flashcards, 'Days of the Week Song' video animation, the pretest, the posttest, video recordings, and classroom observations. The songs were played with a projector the first day, and with a TV the rest of the days.

3.3.1.- 'Weather Song'

'Weather Song' is an original song created by the first author. The topic is, as the title says, the weather. The lyrics were written to be simple and the core vocabulary words and expressions are *what's the weather like today?*, *sunny*, *cloudy*, *rainy*, and *snowy*. Although a non-native English speaker Japanese woman sings in this song, the lyrics were clear and comprehensible.

The melody is uncomplicated and pleasing to the ear. The song is in the key of E♭ major since the melody and accompainment are based on the corresponding scale. The song has an IABCA'B' structure (I stands for intro) and there are nine chords: E♭/E♭^{6}/E♭^{sus2}/E♭maj7^{sus2}, E♭ augmented, Fm, Gm, A♭/A♭maj7/, A♭^{add9}/ A♭$^{add♯11}$, A♭m/ A♭m $^{add2♯11}$, B♭, C m/C m 7, and D♭, which are the tonic of the major mode (I), a passing chord from I to VI, the subtonic (ii), the mediant (iii), the subdominant (IV), the subdominant minor (iv), the dominant (V), the submediant (vi), and the subtonic (♭VII), respectively. Both in section A and A', the E♭ augmented chord work as a passing chord between E♭and C m. In section B and B', the bass melody generates several passing chords. The $^{♯11}$ chords are a brief result of several instruments playing simultaneously. In the end of B', there is D♭, a borrowed chord from the key of E♭minor, which adds an accent color to the last cadence. Finally, in section C, occasional string melody movements generate passing chords like E♭^{sus2} and E♭maj7^{sus2}. As to tempo, it is slow so it may be inferred that it did not prevent the comprehension of words.

This song has female vocals, a piano, an acoustic guitar, an acoustic twelve-string guitar, a xylophone, a glockenspiel, a processed music box, a horn, an oboe, an string ensemble, a double bass, three shakers, a tambourine, a sleigh bell, fingersnaps, a mark tree, two suspended cymbals, timpani, and a drum set. The song has not been animated yet, so it was taught with the aid of flashcards.

This song is intended to be taught using the Total Physical Response approach, using some gestures that corresponds to the lyrics. He re is an example:

Is it sunny?
(Kids raise their arms into a circle.)
Is it cloudy?
(Kids cover their eyes with their hands.)
Is it rainy?
(Kids move their fingers imitating raindrops.)
Is it snowy?
(Kids move their fists up and down imitating falling snowflakes.).

3.3.2.- Weather Song Flashcards

There were used five flashcards representing the key vocabulary words *sunny*, *cloudy*, *rainy*, and *snowy*. The last one has all of them together with a question mark, and it is used to convey the meaning of *what's the weather like today?* The flashcards were colorful, clearly illustrated key vocabulary, and had the corresponding vocabulary words written in them.

3.3.3.- 'Days of the Week Song'

'Days of the Week Song' is an original song created by the first author. The topic is, as the title says, the days of the week. The lyrics were written to be simple. However, they are not limited to the days of the week vocabulary and other actions were also included to make the song more engaging for children. The core vocabulary words are *Sunday*, *Monday*, *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, *Friday*, and *Saturday*. The singer in this song is a native English speaker form United States.

Regarding the music, the melody is simple and amusing. The song is in the key of A♭ major since the melody and accompaniment are based on the corresponding scale. The song has an I/ABA'B'A"B"A'"B'" structure (I stands for intro) and there are nine chords: A♭/A♭^{sus4}, A♭7, B♭, Cm, D♭/D♭maj7, Ddim/Ddim7, E♭/E♭^{sus2}/E♭^{sus4}/E♭^{6}/E♭7, E♭aug, and Fm/Fm7, which are the tonic of the major mode (I), the dominant of the subdominant (V7/IV), the dominant of the dominant (V7/V), the mediant (iii), the subdominant (IV), two

passing chords from the subdominant to the dominant, the dominant and dominant seventh (V,V7), a passing chord from E♭^{6} to E♭, and the submediant (iv). The ^{sus2} and ^{sus4} chords present both in section A and B create subtle tensions that are immediately resolved. The secondary dominants used work as passing chords (A♭7) and as a way of introducing an unexpected tone that reaffirms the tonality (B♭). As explained above, Ddim, Ddim7, and E♭aug work as passing chords too.

As to tempo, it accelerates and slows down following the content of the lyrics. For example, it accelerates when the lyrics say *I shake my body!* and it decelerates to lullaby tempo when they say *I go to sleep*. On top of that, there other subtle tempo marks where the tempo slows down at the end of musical phrases or sections.

This song has male vocals that sing and speak, female vocals that speak, a piano, an auxiliary piano, a percussive organ, a clarinet, an ukulele, an electric bass guitar, a music box, a xylophone, a marimba, finger snaps, maracas, claps, a triangle, a mark tree, a splash cymbal, a suspended cymbal, a drum set, a squeaky toy, a train whistle, and a jaw harp.

This song is intended to be taught also using the Total Physical Response approach, in a similar way to the Weather Song.

3.3.4.- 'Days of the Week Song' Flashcards

Seven flashcards representing the key vocabulary words *Sunday*, *Monday*, *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, *Friday*, and *Saturday* were used. The flashcards featured the characters of the animation Hari and Ellie. Hari appeared on *Sunday*, *Monday*, *Wednesday*, and *Friday* performing the actions described in the song (*wave my hands*, *clap my hands*, *shake my body*, and *go to sleep*). Ellie appeared on the remaining flashcards. The flashcards were colorful and had the corresponding vocabulary words written on them.

3.3.5.- 'Days of the Week Song' Animation

Two members of Tiny Chanters Tribe appear on the video. They are Hari, who is a mischievous boy that wears a fox pajama, and Ellie, who is a brainy girl that wears a cat pajama. First, Ellie asks Hari what he does on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. Then, Hari shows her by performing the

corresponding actions and she imitates him just after that. The video is colorful, motivating, entertaining, and matches the feel of the song.

3.3.6.- The Pretest

The pretest consisted in an interview with each child individually. Despite the author was told the children did not know any English, it was important to perform the pretest to know if the students could produce the target vocabulary before starting the experiment. The pretest assessment sheet included fields for the name of the child, 11 evaluation items (*Sunday*, *Monday*, *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, *Friday*, *Saturday*, *sunny*, *cloudy*, *rainy*, and *snowy*), and a space for side notes. Children were shown the 'Weather Song' flashcards and were asked to name the four target vocabulary words in English. Regarding the 'Days of the Week Song', the original flashcards could not be used since the days of the week are abstract concepts and it is not possible to convey them through pictures unless their meaning has been previously explained. Therefore, new flashcards using concepts that Japanese children were familiar with were created. In Japanese, the days of the week have meanings that everybody can understand as long as they speak the language. Hence, this existing knowledge was used during the assessment. For example, suiyōbi ('Wednesday' in English) means day of the water, so the author used a drop of water to convey the concept of Wednesday when asking for Wednesday, adding its name in Japanese both in hiragana and kanji on the adapted flashcards. Children were asked to name the seven target vocabulary words in English this way.

3.3.7.- The Posttest

The posttest consisted in an interview with each child individually. The posttest assessment sheet had the same structure than the pretest assessment sheet, although the materials used were different. As a result of becoming familiar with the original 'Days of the Week Song' flashcards during the teaching process, children were now able to recognize these in addition to the adapted flashcards in Japanese, which were used as a support. The children were asked to name the target vocabulary words during the posttest. If they failed to remember the words, first author would help by reminding them the associated gesture or the melody. Sometimes the first author sang the lyrics and made a pause when the vocabulary word was supposed to be sung. Some other times, it was observed that children sang

the 'Days of the Week Song' internally or to themselves as a strategy to remember a particular target vocabulary item.

3.3.8.- The video recordings and classroom observations

Recording and paying attention to the pupils' motivation, level of participation, and attention span before and during the activity was essential for the experiment. Analysing these recordings provided information on the children's' progress.

3.4.- Procedure

The first author visited the kindergarten at least once a week from October 2020 until December 2020 in order to establish rapport with the children. It took two days to conduct the pretest in December and another two days to conduct the posttest in January. The song teaching began the day after the pretest took place. Children were taught the songs for four days in a row in December and for another four days in January after the winter holidays, which means that there were eight sessions with each group in total. There was a month interval between first authors' last December lesson and first January lesson. Both songs were played two times only on the first day of teaching. The rest of the days, classes were visited one after another and each song was played only once. Each classroom visit lasted around ten minutes. The teaching procedure with the songs was the following:

1) The first author started a short conversation which included greetings, and the questions *what's the weather like today?* and *what's the day today?* First, children needed Japanese translation, but after a few days, they ended up understanding these questions. Regarding the weather, children were asked *is it sunny?, is it cloudy?, is it rainy?, is it snowy?,* and they were encouraged to say *yes* or *no.* Regarding the days of the week, the first author sang the 'Days of the Week Song' song both in Japanese and English while showing the flashcards and making a pause at the current day at the time. Repetition is necessary in order for the children to learn (Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014).

2) The songs were played and sung along with. There was no video for the Weather Song, so only flashcards and gestures were used to support the song teaching. On the other hand, there was a video for the Days of the Week Song, so the children watched the video while singing and performing the gestures. One way or another, visual referents (Medina, 1990; Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014)

and gestures (Asher, 1966, 1969; Macedonia, 2014) were used to convey meaning to target vocabulary words. The posttest took place the day after finishing the song teaching.

3.5.- Data Analysis and Results

After reviewing the pretests and posttests, it can be concluded that all of the groups improved their vocabulary production. There were statistically significant changes in the pupils' acquisition of productive vocabulary. Kiku and Tampopo (see Figures 6 and 8) groups performed better in average than Sakura and Tsubaki (see Figures 2 and 4) groups, probably due to their age and, consequently, because of a higher cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). In addition, it is important to note that some pupils had previous knowledge before starting the experiment. There were not any pupils in the Sakura and Tsubaki groups that could produce all of the 'Days of the Week Song' target vocabulary, but there were ten pupils who produced all of the 'Weather Song' target vocabulary properly. On the other hand, in the Kiku and Tampopo groups, there were seven pupils who produced all of the 'Days of the Week Song' target vocabulary and 19 pupils who produced all of the 'Weather Song' target vocabulary properly. In the Kiku and Tampopo groups, the most commonly known word was *sunny*, followed by *snowy*, *rainy*, and ending with *cloudy*, for the 'Weather Song', and the most commonly known word was *Monday*, followed by *Tuesday*, *Sunday*, *Wednesday*, *Saturday*, *Friday*, and ending with Thursday, for the 'Days of the Week Song'. In the Sakura and Tsubaki groups, the most commonly known word was *sunny*, followed by *snowy*, *cloudy*, and ending with *rainy*, for the 'Weather Song', and the most commonly known word was *Tuesday*, followed by *Monday*, *Sunday*, *Wednesday*, *Friday*, *Saturday*, and ending with *Thursday*, for the 'Days of the Week Song'.

In the end, 98.3% of the participants improved their vocabulary production abilities and only two pupils did not learn to produce any new vocabulary words. As a consequence, it can be claimed that, regarding vocabulary, the songs used contribute to improve pupils' productive skills.

3.6.- Discussion and Conclusions

The first conclusion that can be drawn from the experiment is that the songs used are valid tools for language acquisition. For children to learn a

second or foreign language, they should be exposed to it through many different activities every day. Both 'Days of the Week Song' and 'Weather Song' are intended to be used on a daily basis as soon as children enter the classroom in the morning and are ready to begin a new school day. In the words of Prir (2018), "English teaching can be very effective if it is based on intensive song usage" (p.78), and sustained oral practice is necessary before children can actively produce new words in a foreign language (Ellis & Heimbach, 1997). Calling the roll, checking the weather, the days of the week, the calendar, the seasons, or the schedule of the day, are examples of activities that are performed each day in kindergartens around the world. Using these songs when checking the weather and the days of the week in a context such as this would help pupils acquire the vocabulary rapidly, not only because of the songs themselves, but also because of the visual supporting materials that are used in these kinds of activities.

The songs used in this experiment did not only enhance vocabulary memorization as the posttest demonstrates, but also helped to trigger involuntary mental rehearsal and practice in low voice. Some of the pupils started singing the songs when they saw the first author, sometimes as a way of manifesting their wish to perform the activities carried out in our short English lessons. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that a few pupils gave a wrong answer during the posttest, but they guessed the correct one after remembering the melody by themselves or being reminded of it by first author. This proves that music is a good mnemonic. A few other pupils gave a correct answer with a low voice, and after being asked to repeat their answer due to pronunciation checking, they said they did not know. Their answers were counted as errors.

Pupils' speaking and listening skills did also improve, as most of them could recognize and say songs' target vocabulary words. If teachers want their pupils to be able to use target language points, children should be encouraged to reproduce the songs, since it is not possible to develop oral skills by only listening and providing non-verbal responses with gestures (Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014). Even with all that, some children might not produce target vocabulary due to the 'silent period', which is the first of five language acquisition stages described by Krashen (1985). According to Krashen (1985), children are internally processing the

second language and they will not communicate orally during this stage. Furthermore, "it should be recalled that in their regular lessons, the children were not accustomed to producing the L2 [English] orally" (Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2004, p. 283).

The songs used contributed to break boundaries between first author and the pupils. Some of the children were already outgoing and tried to speak to him both in English and Japanese, but others began to speak to him only after the experiment began. Pupils showed their motivation through their enthusiasm for singing, the enjoyment the songs brought them, and their willingness to participate in activities conducted in English. Their mood changed completely after singing the songs. Having daily lessons in English helped some of them to feel encouraged and confident about their English skills, too. When pupils came across the first author at the kindergarten, some greeted him with expressions like *good morning* or *hello*, or even asked him questions like *do you like honey?* or *how are you?*. Then, the use of gestures, flashcards and 'Days of the Week Song' animation helped the pupils focus their attention on the activities, and were an excellent way of conveying meaning. Finally, the gestures performed while singing contributed to develop children's own body awareness, and were a good source of physical stimulation.

There was a pupil in Kiku group whose conduct did not match with the rest of her classmates' behavior. Her pretest score was perfect for the 'Days of the Week Song' target vocabulary words, but she did not know any of the 'Weather Song' target vocabulary words. During the first days, she did not want to listen or even stay in the classroom when first author was teaching the songs. A few days later, she stayed in the classroom but did not pay attention. Her teacher said that she already knew the vocabulary, which was later demonstrated by her perfect posttest scores for both songs. It is difficult to explain the reason behind this. Perhaps she was a gifted child, and managed to memorize 'Weather Song' target vocabulary words within a day of practicing, or maybe she learned them in a *juku*, which are Japanese private schools that children attend after compulsory school. Children have different strengths, talents, and personalities. Songs might work better on those who are more active and musically oriented (Gardner, 1983). Moreover, the less proficiency

children have in their mother language, the less proficiency they will have in a second or foreign language. There were children who were more mature and had a broader educational stimuli background than others, and this circumstance was reflected on the results. For example, there was a pupil who did not reply to any of the questions that were asked and remained completely silent during the pretest and the posttest. This could be a result of either ignorance, shyness, or both.

Although the majority of pupils enhanced their vocabulary production skills, many pupils' pronunciation was not perfect. Typical pronunciation mistakes that Japanese make when they speak English were detected. For example, many of them said *curoudy* or *croudy* instead of *cloudy*, which usually happens because Japanese language does not have both consonant blends and /l/ sound. Then, many children said /reeni/ instead of rainy, probably because it is common for Japanese speakers to elongate the *e* in the syllables that contain *ei*. This happens in words like *sensei*, which is pronounced /sensee/. These little mistakes were not ccounted as mistakes. Other accepted answers were *sun* and *snow* for *sunny* and *snowy*, respectively. There was even a pupil from Tsubaki class who said *it's sunny*, since he remembered that first author used to ask the pupils to say the weather this way. In contrast, there were other mispronounced words such as *curowi*, *crowy*, *clowy*, *creimy*, *weiny*, *renwy*, *snowdy*, *snorry*, or *snody*, that were counted as mistakes. Regarding the 'Days of the Week Song' target vocabulary words, *Sunde* instead of *Sunday*, *Tuesde* or *Chuesday* instead of *Tuesday*, *Wensde*, *Wesde*, *Wende*, and *Wedsday* instead of Wednesday, and *Thrusde*, *Thusday*, *Thsde*, *Fersday*, *Frshday*, *Frsde*, or *Fursde* instead of *Thursday*, and *Fride* or *Fariday* instead of *Friday* were not accounted as mistakes. In *Sunde*, *Tuesde*, *Wensde*, and *Fride*, the *e* was elongated as in *sensei*, and *Chusday* is the best approximation to English sound *ti*, a sound that does not exist in Japanese. In addition, *Wesde*, *Wende*, *Wedsday*, *Thrusde*, *Thusday*, *Thsde*, *Fersday*, *Frshday*, *Frsde*, *Fursde*, and *Fariday* are good approximations for native Japanese speakers whose brain and phonological systems are not ready to pronounce consonant blends yet. On the other hand, *Wesdes*, *Ansday*, *Renday*, *Raday*, *Fuwaday*, *Fuwaby*, *Santurday* or *Ayuday* (note how the vowels match the vowels in Saturday in this last example) were counted as mistakes. It is also worth pointing out how a few pupils mistook *sunny* for *Sunday*, and vice versa. Besides, a pupil said *sleepy* after seeing the flashcards representing *Thursday*, since the image represents Hari sleeping and this action was mentioned

in the song. The fact that many pupils mispronounced target vocabulary words indicates that their acquisition of receptive vocabulary was higher than that of productive vocabulary. With respect to pronunciation, there is a last but essential matter that needs to be highlighted. This experiment was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that first author had to wear a mask from the first moment he attended the kindergarten in October 2020. The participants of this experiment never saw his mouth when being taught the songs, which is probably another reason why many of them mispronounced target vocabulary words.

The nature of the songs used should be taken into account when assessing their teaching potential. The blend of lyrics, music, and actions may make particular words more salient than others (Schön et al., 2008). Therefore, pupils might learn those words in a higher percentage than others. This is especially relevant for 'Days of the Week Song' song. Thursday is the day pupils learned the less, probably because it is in the middle of a verse, its pronunciation is difficult for Japanese speaking pupils, and the pitch of the verse at that point is lower compared to what it was at the beginning. On the contrary, the highest percentage of learned days where the days from Sunday to Wednesday. There was another issue regarding 'Days of the Week Song' song. During the posttest, it was evident that, despite the fact that they knew the target vocabulary words, many of the pupils did not know their correspondence with Japanese days of the week, or even Japanese days of the week. This could be remedied with daily activities like those described previously.

Actions and onomatopoeias used while presenting songs might hinder target language points acquisition. This problem was noted by Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra (2014), who observed that not only their pupils were focusing on the onomatopoeias too much, but also that some kids were dancing and not listening to the lyrics. On that note, there is a moment in 'Days of the Week Song' when the lyrics say *I shake my* body and pupils are supposed the shake their arms and legs. In hindsight, this verse triggered unwanted behaviors on some pupils, since they did not listen to the song, laughed too much, or even screamed when they heard it. In the authors' opinion, this could be easily prevented by teaching children not to overreact. To sum up, teachers should avoid over-emphasizing gestures and amusing sounds so children do not get distracted.

To conclude, a minimum number of repetitions are essential to ensure retention, but too many repetitions of a song may cause boredom (Coyle & Gómez Gracia,

2014). The songs used during the experiment were made forecasting this issue, and there are enough repetitions of target language points within each song so it is not necessary to repeat them.

All this provides an overall view that allows us to give an answer to the research question *How should a song be to encourage and benefit English learning to its full potential?*

In summary, the factors that make a song suitable to answer the research question were identified. It might not be possible to gather all of them together at the same time, but the more there are, the higher the chance of the song reaching its purpose of being optimal for English teaching purposes. As explained before, these elements have to do with sociological considerations (foster a sense of community, break boundaries, and promote culture, both the pupils' and other countries'), Krashens' (1982) 'affective filter hypothesis' (be motivating, developing self-confidence, and lowering anxiety), class atmosphere (enhancing pupils attention span and concentration, helping them socializing, changing their mood, influencing their emotions, sensibility, and creativity), memory, and language specific skills (vocabulary, grammar, stylistic techniques, and the four skills) and physical movement. Besides, some of these factors are closely related to the music itself, as detailed below.

The topic of the song must be familiar to pupils due to its relation to their interests, experiences and prior knowledge. The contents must also be supported by the curriculum. The lyrics should be slightly above the current language level of the pupils, be repetitive, and blend in smoothly with the melody so they are easy to memorize. The melody itself should be simple, easy, and not make the lyrics incomprehensible, but complex enough to be entertaining and to motivate pupils to sing. Songs that are in a major key are usually perfect for English teaching purposes, but sometimes a change of key can add interest and, consequently, favor memorization.

A melody can be harmonized in many different ways, with only two chords, like Super Simple Songs' Open Shut Them, or with dozens of them, like many jazz standards. Harmonically speaking, most of the Super Simple Songs' songs that were analyzed are literally extremely simple, but some others include sixth and major seven chords, dominant seventh chords that do not resolve in the corresponding tonic, diminished chords, secondary dominants, and modulations. 'Weather Song'

and 'Days of the Week Song' songs are not harmonically as simple as the most basic Super Simple Songs songs, and the authors believe harmonizing a song for English teaching purposes involves both personal taste and common sense.

The tempo must be slow enough to let pupils learn the lyrics and practice them at a slow pace, but sometimes it can be fun and entertaining to accelerate and decelerate the speed in order to make the song more interesting, keep the pupils amused, make a thrilling increase, or for playing purposes, as happens in Super Simple Songs' version of 'Head Shoulders Knees & Toes'. Songs for English teaching purposes must be short, and as for their structure, it should be simple and repetitive, that is, be conceived and arranged to teach clear and specific language points.

Regarding the instrumentation, Super Simple Songs uses all kind of musical instruments and its use depends on the style and topic of the song. The most used ones are the piano, the glockenspiel, the xylophone, the clarinet, the electric bass and the double bass, the drum set, the shaker, temple and wood blocks. Other music instruments utilized are the electric piano, the synthesizer, the accordion, the recorder, the marimba, the vibraphone, the balafon, the banjo, the acoustic guitar, the electric guitar, the harp, and the zither. Also, orchestral instruments are used, such as string sections playing legato and pizzicato, suspended, effect, and orchestral cymbals, and the gran cassa. Although the bass is usually played by an electric or double bass, it is fun when it is played by a tuba. Last, not only instruments like the bongos, the triangle, the tambourine, the cowbell, the güiro, are played as percussion instruments, but also the mark tree, the slide whistle, and the cuica are used as effect instruments. In short, almost any instrument can be used and the priority when choosing instruments should be to make the song interesting and fun for children.

Finally, a well-crafted and attractive animation which is adapted to the age of pupils can be a great addition because it helps conveying meaning and attracts the attention of pupils. Moreover, a song will be remembered more easily if gestures are performed, since "empirical evidence has shown that language learning and representation are intrinsically connected to the body" (Macedonia, 2014, p. 4). To sum up, if, as supported by theory, pupils are taught through a combination of auditory, visual, and physical inputs, it will be more likely for them to acquire the contents in the curriculum.

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APPENDIX: List of songs by Super Simple Songs analysed

The songs have been ranked from lowest to highest number of chords used

1.- Open Shut Them

This song is in the key of D major and has two chords (D major and A major).

2.- The Pinocchio

This song is in the key of D major and has two chords (D major and A major).

3.- How's The Weather?

This song is in the key of E ♭ major has two chords (E♭major and B♭major).

4.- Put On Your Shoes

This song is in the key of C major and has two chords (C major and G major / G7) and a passing chord (Gmaj7).

5.- I'm A Little Snowman

This song is in the key of B major and has three chords (B major, E major, and F♯Major).

6- One Little Finger

This song is in the key of E ♭ major and has three chords (E♭major, A ♭major, and B♭major).

7.- Counting Bananas

This song is in the key of E ♭ major and has three chords (E♭major, A ♭7, and B♭major). A ♭7 chord do not resolve in D ♭major or minor as a secondary dominant is supposed to. Instead, it is played as if it was a blues standard where frequently the IV and V degrees are dominant seventh chords.

8.- Hello!

This song begins in the key of E♭major but modulates to the key of E♭minor in the first repetition of section B to emphasize the bad feelings mentioned in the lyrics. The chords in the first key are E♭major and B♭major, while the chords in the second key are E♭minor and B♭major.

9.- Walking In The Jungle

This song begins in the key of D major but modulates to the key of E♭major halfway to add interest and

prevent listeners' boredom. The chords in the first key are D major, A major, and B minor, while the chords in the second key are E♭major, B♭major, and C minor.

10.- Do You Like Broccoli Ice-Cream?

This song is in the key of D major and has four chords (D major, F minor, G major, and A major).

11.- Hello Hello!

This song is in the key of F major has four chords (F major, B♭major, C major, and D minor).

12.- Good Morning, Mr. Rooster

This song is in the key of B ♭ major and has five chords (B ♭ major, D minor, E ♭ major, and F major / F7 / F6, and C major). F6 is a passing chord, while C major is a secondary dominant that is used to lead the harmony to the V.

13.- I See Something Blue

This song is in the key of C major and has six chords (C major, D minor, G major, G diminished, A minor, and B diminished). G diminished is used to to generate tension before children have to seek objects of the color that is mentioned, while B diminished is used to lead the harmony to C major.

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