

A Review on the Application and Effects of Songs in Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract: This essay investigates the use of songs and their impact on acquiring vocabulary in other languages. As a universal cognitive trait, music has been used into language instruction strategies more and more. Songs are utilised to improve focus, make learning more fun, and help with memorisation. According to the dual coding theory, memory is improved when verbal and nonverbal information—like words and music—are processed simultaneously. According to studies, songs can help students acquire vocabulary by offering thematic context and rhythmic repetition, which facilitates memorisation. However, a number of variables, like student age and melody familiarity, affect how effective a song is. According to certain research, songs—especially those with unusual melodies—may not have a noticeable impact on students or even divert them. Future studies must to take into account the learners' ages as well as the particular circumstances in which songs work best. The study comes to the conclusion that, when paired with other techniques, songs can be an effective instrument for teaching vocabulary in foreign languages.

Keywords: Foreign language learning, vocabulary, songs.

1. Introduction

Music is defined as one of “general characteristics of human cognition” [1]. With the development of the times, the teaching methods of foreign language vocabulary have become more diverse. Songs are considered to be a teaching method in the foreign language class, and they are also used to teach vocabulary in foreign language. The methods of teachers teaching foreign language vocabulary through songs in class vary in different periods and continue to develop.

The influences of songs in the process of learning foreign language vocabulary are a popular topic. A lot of studies have indicated that songs are beneficial for learning the target language. Songs can help create a pleasant environment of foreign language learning, focus attention, facilitate the memorization of a foreign language. Some studies also show that songs have no effect on foreign language vocabulary learning. Whether the song is effective in acquiring foreign language vocabulary or not is influenced by many factors, among which the age of the learner is one factor.

This paper focuses on the methods of applying songs in foreign language classrooms and the effects of songs in L2 vocabulary learning. Based on this, this paper reviews the relevant studies on the applications and the role of songs in learning foreign language vocabulary, summarizes the corresponding theories and experimental results, identifies the research trends, and finds limitations,

so as to provide ideas for future study, and provide suggestions for future foreign language vocabulary teaching.

2. Related Theories

Dual coding is a well-known academic research project [2], when processing both verbal and non-verbal coding, for example, processing music voice and text at the same time, improving a person's ability to remember single words [3]. Thus, song is powerful auxiliary tool to oral memory. Reading a song rhythmically enhances the recall of every word of the text, especially when there is a beat [4]. As Murphy once said, music has a tremendous power, it can stay in the mind of the person who has heard it, it may be heard today and remembered tomorrow, it can linger in the mind for a short period of time, but music also has a long-term effect and it can pop back into the mind next month or even next year, so if you interweave language into music, It helps a lot with language memory [5].

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Impacts of Songs in Different Vocabulary Skillednesses

In many Western countries, such as Canada, the United States and Mexico, children know the song "The Wheels on the Bus". In teaching practice, researchers chose the lyrics of the first verse of "The Wheels on the Bus". Such songs are suitable for foreign language teaching for several reasons. There are 11 monosyllabic words in the lyrics of this song, and several key verbs are repeated several times at the end of the sentence. Such repetition can increase the memory of this word and facilitate listening training. These phrases are very short, there are necessary pauses between the phrases, which will be relatively easy for students to sing these songs by themselves; There is also a lot of repetition in this song, such as rhythm and melody, which simulates the accent pattern of spoken language, which can deepen the memory, and it is easy to sing while understanding the words, so that you can naturally master the words. Here we can give an example of how the song "The Wheels on the Bus" turned into a song about sea life helps children develop language learning skills, like listening, speaking and vocabulary. The song is "The little fish swim in the sea. They love to swim. They go every day, every day, every day. The shrimps cry loudly in the sea, they love to make sounds, every day, every day, every day. The crabs hold up their pincers in the sea, and the pincers they love to lift, cry every day, cry every day, cry every day. "...Through this ocean-related song, children can enhance their vocabulary by listening to repeated words and phrases such as "swim, swim, swim", expand several words on the topic in a single song, and increase their vocabulary; At the same time, from the relationship between the last sentence and the context of the word, children can understand that fish swim in the sea. This will undoubtedly increase the overall understanding of this mastered vocabulary, and have a deeper understanding and impression of this word; In this song, there are repeated melodies and paragraphs, which makes it easier for children to catch key words when listening to the song. Long-term training can improve listening ability and vocabulary capturing skills. Different sentences also have different melodies, which allows children to immerse themselves in the ocean world, listen to the words while listening to the song, and easily master the ocean words by ear; After listening to the song for several times, the children are more familiar with the song and can sing it out. At the same time, the pronunciation and intonation of those words are naturally mastered. Through practicing oral English by singing, children can master the vocabulary more quickly and happily [6].

3.1.1. Using Music to Alleviate Vocabulary Learning Boredom

Purcell pointed out that it is very boring when students need to understand new vocabulary [7]. Because of this boring mood, many students do not learn words or learn fewer words, resulting in a decline in the overall vocabulary and other bad situations. Because there are different melodies in music, listening to a song over and over can reduce this feeling of boredom. Hello, for example, has some very everyday expressions that are perfect for listening activities. If the teacher sings or performs the song, students can respond and understand the vocabulary.

3.1.2. Vocabulary

Songs can provide reference context from a point of view, and the correlation between these words is undoubtedly very high, so that memorizing words is easier and more convenient. Nursery rhymes, in particular, are monosyllabic words, often repeating many words and phrases. This helps children to be more exposed to these words, improve children's initiative and interest in memorizing words, and improve their ability to learn vocabulary. At the same time, songs provide students with the opportunity to listen to a variety of rhythms. English is a language with a stressed rhythm, and songs help us build feelings.

3.1.3. Spoken Language

Through songs, people can naturally master words and phrases, and at the same time they are not prone to negative emotions. In this way, songs effectively help with vocabulary practice. For example, singing a catchy and easy to remember song such as "Boys and girls come out to play" allows children to naturally imitate new sounds and learn vocabulary in a relaxed atmosphere. Another example is Ohata, who points out that understanding of different types of English structures brings Japanese students a lot of trouble [8]. Different structures such as consonant causes make it difficult for them to pronounce and understand accurately as Asian scholars. However, Asian scholars can learn vocabulary more effectively and accurately through singing, and they can choose their favorite songs.

3.2. The Specific Strategies of Using Songs in Vocabulary Teaching

Using picture cards to teach words can be a great help. Picture cards are good helpers for children to learn words in songs. polard-durodola et al. pointed out that picture cards can effectively improve English acceptance in terms of teaching, and that young children's expressive vocabulary combines picture cards with book reading [9]. Children need to learn expressive vocabulary in the second language, which can be better learned and accepted in the combination of picture cards and reading. These academic results reflect the additional unexpected effects of picture card pairs in the context of a song. Studying with non-native English speaking students, Schunk studied whether the apply of gestures in songs influenced the intervention of song modality in children's vocabulary learning [10]. Young learners are educated to use gestures that relate to the meaning of target words. Educators can use picture cards to introduce children to the lyrics of songs. The songs were shown to the students three times in two weeks. Schuck found that when songs were performed with hand gestures, the children's receptivity to all songs improved significantly, and their memory of words certainly increased. Songs are a popular teaching resource for young English teachers all over the world, especially for young teachers [11,12]. Song is actually an umbrella term that contains many concepts. There are many categories of songs, such as instrumental songs, artistic songs, and rock songs, and different kinds of songs contain different words and knowledge [13]. Different teachers have their own different styles and different teaching forms. They divide students into two groups of boys and

girls, or the whole class plays the game as a whole, and present the rules of the music game through projection or live performance, supplemented by fill-in-the-blank and sequencing in this way [14].

3.3. The Influences of Songs on Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning

The issue of the influences of songs on foreign language vocabulary learning is controversial in the academic community.

3.3.1. Positive Impacts of Songs on Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning

Most scholars believe that the application of songs in the classroom has a favorable effect on students' acquisition of foreign language vocabulary. Students who learnt texts through song did better in memory, pronunciation and translation than those who learnt texts through spoken poetry [15]. For their study, Good et al. invited 38 children in Puerto Lopez, Ecuador who speak Spanish from an primary school. And they were randomly assigned to either a speaking or singing environment. The speaking team consists of 22 students; 9 women and 13 men. The singing team consists of 16 students; 10 women and 6 men. The sex ratios of the two groups were not similar. The age range of students is between 9 and 13 years old. None of them had any formal English learning experience. The purpose of this study is to investigate how songs promote foreign language learning. The study divided students into two groups and let them study an English song over a two-week period. The first group learned the lyrics as a song, and the second learned the lyrics as a rhythmic poem. The children were checked for their ability to pronounce English vowels and consonants, recite song lyrics word-for-word, and translate lyrics from English to Spanish. Children in both situations studied four courses and took three tests within two weeks, and then underwent follow-up tests six months later. The study found that while there was no difference in consonant pronunciation conditions, children in singing conditions were better at reproducing vowels than children in speaking conditions. Children in the singing state recalled more ordered words than those in the speaking state. Compared to students in the speaking environment, students in the singing state have fewer syllable errors. Children in the singing state translate English words more successfully than children in the speaking state. After six months, the memories of English words in the singing state persisted. The study also found that a element that is beneficial for song recall is the rhythm and melody of the text. The second factor that may be beneficial for a song's recall is the combination of melody and lyrics. The theme of the song may promote the recall of subsequent parts by promoting the recall of the melody, which also promotes the recollection of the entire text [15]. This study supports the view that vowels can integrate melody information better than consonants, and proves that songs have advantages in the translation of foreign words [15]. Singing will increase the fun of classroom activities and attract children's attention. However, a limitation of the study is that the average age of these groups of children was significantly unsimilar, which may account for some of the difference in results. Song conditions involve guitar accompaniment and may have an impact on concentration. Guitars are a novelty in the classroom that may grab students' attention. It is not sure whether the same song benefits would be found without guitar accompaniment. No method is provided to explain to what extent pleasure and cognitive competence are due to the song's superiority. Overall, previous research has shown that songs are conducive to foreign language learning, containing memorization, pronunciation, and translation of foreign words. Light music is good for students' learning of English words [16]. Seventy intermediate English language learners aged 16-20 years old will be divided into two groups, one group will listen to light music while studying and learning words and one group will not listen to light music. The study showed that students who played light music learnt and remembered the words better than if there was no music at all. This may be because, when it comes to emotions, the right music can make people feel more strongly [16]. For example, soft and slow music can restore

our calm, stabilise our mind and improve our concentration. Energetic music can make us less tired and more motivated to study [16]. Music can create a pleasant atmosphere for studying and can help people to engage [16]. In terms of memorisation, the structural features of songs in terms of rhythm, melody and tonal structure may further promote memory of the article. The speed of text presentation in songs is slower than that in speeches, which facilitates text recall [15]. In terms of pronunciation, songs facilitate the practice of foreign language vocabulary pronunciation. This is because the advantages of songs in pronunciation are probably most evident in vowels. When singing in the native language, people tend to extend the length of the vowels in songs, which helps with pronunciation [15].

3.3.2. Songs with No Impact on Vocabulary Learning

Songs have no impact on the mother tongue mastering of infants and young children. 59 preschool children were divided into two groups: those aged 29-32 months and those aged 47-50 months [1]. Teach them new words separately through singing and speaking, and conduct a test after that. For children aged 29-32 months, they can access novel word-object relations in both song and spoken language environments. For children aged 47-50 months, compared to using songs, teaching words in spoken language is more effective. Songs may help increase attention on specific tasks, but songs may have no effect on deep learning. Using spoken sentences may work best when allowing children to learn new concepts. However, the test results may be influenced by additional factors due to the varying levels of familiarity with words among the tested children [1].

3.3.3. Negative Effects of Songs on Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning

Calvert and Billingsley found that compared to hearing others sing to unfamiliar melodies, preschool students can better recall phone numbers when they hear someone say it. Songs with melodies unfamiliar to learners may distract their attention and have negative effects on vocabulary learning [17].

4. Conclusion

This paper reviews the different uses of songs in the teaching of vocabulary listening, pronunciation and memory. Songs can be combined with other teaching methods to bring better vocabulary learning results. The influence of songs on vocabulary learning is different under different conditions. Songs are an effective means of foreign language vocabulary teaching. Since the age span of foreign language learners is large, it is necessary to consider whether and how the application of songs in foreign language vocabulary teaching has different effects on students of different ages in the future.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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