

USING SONGS AND POEMS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract- Listening songs, reading and writing poetry, discussing it keep the ordinary language lesson out of the typical EFL classroom. While many teachers agree that poetry promotes language acquisition, they will also add that poetic concepts and cultural assumptions are usually too difficult for EFL learners to take on. This might be true of poetry as a reading activity, however, the use of songs and poetry in practice can provide an effective and collaborative means of language learning and of personal expression. Simple forms can give students a framework for expressing ideas that are meaningful to them, without the constraints of grammatical accuracy. Pattern poems offer ways of making English a means of personal expression, creativity and development, serving to reduce affective barriers in a nonthreatening learning environment. Popular song scripts can also facilitate awareness of pronunciation, intonation and sentence flow, in addition to containing contemporary cultural commentary. This paper therefore suggests that a broader perspective on the use of songs and poetry in the language classroom can lead to meaningful and successful language learning.

Index Terms- English, teaching, songs, poems, reading, listening, comprehension, language learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Poetry and music are elements of each human society. They show many aspects of its culture - the relationship to the past and the ancestors, the faith, the fun and the anxieties of its people, the hopes and the view of the future. Music and poetry have immanent powers, for example they give people energy who had none before or they can change people's mood. They occur in all phases of one's life from birth to death. So they play an important role in the process of learning and using the mother tongue. Music and poetry are also an essential part of foreign language learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional view of songs and poetry as one of the most sophisticated forms of literary and linguistic expression, makes it by definition inaccessible to all but the most advanced language learners. Even then, the wealth of literary allusions, historical references and cultural assumptions typically found in the works of great poets, can limit comprehension greatly for the native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) alike. As Brindley points out: "Poems often deal with geographical or social settings alien to the students' experience. Perhaps the greatest barrier to understanding poetry, however, is its elliptical, metaphorical, and highly allusive language. Poetry, from this perspective (i.e. as a high-level, individual reading activity), has little to offer the EFL classroom, especially at middle school and high school level". [1].

However, if we take a broader view of the term, we find that: "a poem is a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their beauty and sound and are carefully arranged, often in short lines which rhyme" [2]. This definition, which contains no reference to comprehension of difficult metaphorical, cultural, or ethical allusions, and nothing about grammatical correctness, metrical structure, sentence structure or logical sequencing of ideas, opens the doors to pop-songs, haiku, pattern poems, picture poems, nursery rhymes and folk-songs, all of which can be viewed as poetry. By stressing enjoyment, and presenting poetry "through media and methods that provide maximum student involvement and interest" [1], not only can language learning can be facilitated, but learners at all levels can use the medium of poetry to express themselves in the target language.

A further assumption regarding the studying and writing of poetry is that it is an individual activity. This paper, however, takes an interactive, collaborative approach, and describes how poems can be used to promote cooperation and communication as well as individual expression, in the EFL classroom. By inviting students to be "in the poem" [5], actively reading poems in pairs or other small groupings, and creating ideas together, poetry can become an integral part of the EFL classroom and can be a means of investigating issues relevant to the students' backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are many reasons for using songs and rhymes in teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools. Naturally, “children really enjoy learning and singing songs” [6] and have fun doing rhythmic activities while reciting rhymes. But there are deeper psychological, cultural and linguistic aspects.

A familiar way of language acquisition

Most learners grow up with songs and rhymes and develop their first language by them. Apart from being the most important spoken language, songs and rhymes are the first experienced parts of communication in the learner’s mother tongue. They listen and react to nursery rhymes and finger games spoken and often acted by their parents. They go to sleep with lullabies sung by their closest caregivers or try to imitate little songs by babbling. So songs and rhymes give them an intimate feeling, a special connection with their human environment and influence the acquisition of their first language in an important way. Analogous to the development of the mother tongue, the following points also support foreign language acquisition:

- music, rhythm and rhymes produce a positive live feeling;
- they motivate to learn and to be active;
- children do not understand all words but do not feel inhibited;
- rhythm supports vocabulary and structure learning [3].

The holistic approach

Songs and rhymes are both means and content of foreign language acquisition. There is no gap between the language used in lessons and that used in real-life situations. Each understanding and each reacting are progresses in language learning. Songs and rhymes stimulate the hemispherical interaction. Busy with songs and rhymes the left hemisphere (vocabulary, structure of the language) and the right hemisphere (rhythm, feelings, mimic, gesture, senso-motoric etc.) work together and make learning more effective. So it is small wonder how quick students are at learning songs and rhymes. The holistic approach also means that rhymes and songs are connected with other learning and living areas like sport, literature, music and art.

Motivation by songs and rhymes

Students’ motivation to learn largely depends on the teaching methods and the teacher’s personality. If the teacher skillfully uses songs and rhymes the students usually are highly motivated. Songs and rhymes are relaxing, they vary the lesson’s progress, they provide fun and action “and encourage harmony within oneself and within a group” [6]. So the students are learning with fun and more effectively than without these forms. Even shy or slow learning students are given encouragement by singing or speaking in choir and so they feel able to speak in a foreign language.

Provision of meaningful vocabulary

Songs and rhymes present a lot of linguistic material in a natural linguistic context. So they support the monolingual and contextual approach in teaching a foreign language. Words in songs and rhymes are meaningful to the learner, which influences the acquisition in a positive way. “In general they use simple conversational language with a lot of repetition” [6]. Therefore, songs and rhymes stick in the learner’s mind and the words and expressions used are memorized more easily. Besides, songs and rhymes provide many possibilities for constant repetition and revising as important mechanisms of the language acquisition.

Support for phonetic development

“Poems, rhymes, chants and songs could be used to give a feeling for the rhythm of the spoken language. Many well-known rhymes make use of the iambic pentameter, the natural rhythm of the English language” [4]. Practicing intonation through reciting rhymes and poems is mostly funny and very effective. To vary the sometimes boring pronunciation teaching it is a proven remedy using rhymes and rhythmic chants, e.g. with minimal pairs.

The cultural aspect

Songs and Poems are important elements of each culture. Learning these authentic materials students get to know parts of a foreign culture. It satisfies learner’s natural curiosity about everything new. Being familiar with songs and rhymes in a foreign language pupils feel closer to the foreign culture and its language. If the students hear the same melodies or similar rhymes they are astonished at the parallels between their own culture and the foreign one. So the foreign cultures are not alarming and frightening but interesting and worth being discovered. It’s an important contribution to the development of tolerance and open-mindedness.

According to the guidelines for teaching songs and rhymes and depending on the concrete situation the teacher can vary the way of teaching these forms. It should not be forgotten to back up the basic vocabulary before introducing a song or rhyme or making sure that the content is understandable. The teacher should provide different possibilities for the students to comprehend the text.

The English teacher can choose from among a lot of types of songs and rhymes with special characteristics and different actions. Each teacher should collect useful songs and rhymes on which he can fall back. If he or she knows the possibilities to exploit these forms the teacher should be able to use songs and rhymes successfully in English lessons.

We know from our experience that students love English songs and rhymes. All teachers should see this big advantage and use songs and rhymes as a permanent part of their English lessons not only in primary school. We as teachers also enjoy singing, dancing and reciting with our children in class because it gives us the chance to influence the children's development in a positive way and to intensify relationship to our children.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to indicate how poems and poetry-related activities might enhance English language learning. It is suggested that a focus on the beauty of the words of the target language and on their student-directed use in non-grammatical as well as in grammatical contexts, can promote meaningful and relevant expression of personal meanings, in addition to focusing on particular aspects of structure and syntax. A great depth of poetic expression can be found in pop-song scripts, which voice the hopes and fears of artists who are often seen as role-models by secondary students. By using these scripts as linguistic and affective templates, language students can interact with the target language, while exploring issues which have deep meaning to them. Songs and rhymes have an important function in teaching English as a foreign language. Beside games and visual aids they support by virtue of their typical characteristics the language acquisition for learners. Songs and rhymes combine important didactic claims like the holistic, the monolingual and the contextual approach with fun, activity and motivation. Almost incidentally the students become familiar with parts of the foreign culture and see them as enrichment for their own life.

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