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The Effect of Music and Songs in Learning of Second Language

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ABSTRACT

Learning second language (L2) has always been a common practice for varieties of reasons –for the purpose of studying, travelling, among others. In this pursuit, review from literature reveals that L2 learning had always been challenging and disturbing, resulting in discontinuation of the process or imperfect learning experience. In view of attending to this problem, this study, through argument from literature and the personal experience of the author posits that music is a viable tool that should be continuously and consistently employed for the process of L2 learning. In addition, Krashen's theory of second language acquisition is discussed in view of explaining the significance of motivation as an affective filter variable, and vocabulary structure as found in music to be contributory to second language learning.

Key words: second language, motivation, music, songs, acquisition

Introduction

Learning second language had been observed to be difficult, most especially when there are no motivational factors that will continuously be stimulating the learners' interest. In many cases, classroom teaching process and other formal setting of language learning have been employed and considerably functional and productive. In the same vein, according to Salcedo (2002), song can be employed to create enough resilience that will stick in of the students and garner the needed experience to succeed with certain language structures. It is equally opined that music features target culture, capable of being understood without disengaging the listening enjoyment. The literature also indicates that a rhythmic presentation benefits memorization, particularly when the verbal information is meaningful (Jones, 2010). However, it should be noted that employing music and songs in English class (or learning process of any second language) is not a replacement to other methods, but rather one of the necessary complementary teaching methods (Salcedo, 2002).

Review of extant literatures revealed that researchers have proposed the usage of music in the foreign language classroom. Aida (1994) proposed it will lower anxiety and also provide physiological benefits. Willis and Mason (1994) submitted that music guides lesson planning and practical classroom use, Abrate (1998) opines it improves speaking pronunciation, while Purcell (1992) stated that it enhances cultural awareness and sensitivity. Based on the foregoing, this paper reviews past related studies on the effect of music on the learning of second language. The author also shares his personal experience in the learning of Malaysian language, being an Arab influenced to learn the language due to his interest in one of the country's

famous singers. In conclusion, this paper summarily argues the potency of using music as one of the learning methods in the teaching and learning of second language.

Review of Past Related Studies

Many studies have shown that teaching different parts of a language using songs may assist the language learning process in the classroom (Ayotte, 2004; Schon, Magne&Besson, 2008). Furthermore, different studies have been carried out on music and songs impact on brain activities process (Zhang, Wang, & Wu, 2011) during the process of learning and the results have indicated that melody and songs can scheme the language learning process in particular and learning in general (Jones, 2010; Ozment&Gurgen, 2010). Literature review in the music effect area on acquisition of second language provides evidence indicating the effect of music on the different language acquisition aspects. Some research studies done in these areas, as well as suggestions from important leaders in the field of foreign languages will be discussed in this section under the headings titled Music and First or Second Language Acquisition and, Music and Pronunciation.

Music and First or Second Language Acquisition

Researchers of language agree (Fiske, 1993) to the fact that there seems to be some symbiotic link between the underlying principles and the language mental processing and music at the meta-level. It has been stated that native language are being learnt by infant by principles which make aural information sense; it therefore seems reasonable approaching second language acquisition in the same way (Jackendoff, 1994). Since acquisition of music is also through the aural sense, activities of music are suggested to facilitate in the acquisition of first or second language. Hungarian studies reviewed by Marquart (1992) have concluded that differences that are remarkable exist between children who are sung to daily and those who are not, especially in the speech and language acquisition area. Marquart gives the explanation of these studies background: Majority of these studies are based on Kodály's philosophy, the Hungarian musicologist, researcher, composer and philosopher, who believed in music playing an important role in developing mankind. He also believed that it is paramount beginning music education at the possible youngest age. His opinion is that music should be placed in the curriculum as one of a core subject. His investigation shows that classes receiving daily music instruction surpassed classes receiving less frequent instruction academically. Noted improvement in other academic areas, especially math, was a result that is not expected the first experiment of Kodály. His studies result convinced the Hungarian Ministry of Education to further expand Singing in Primary Schools.

Lowe (1995) sets knowing whether the music program incorporation would strengthen both the music learning and the second language learning. Her study's subjects were 53 second-grade students of the French Immersion program in Canada that were set up in interdisciplinary music and French classes. Students were subjected to eight weekly units of five 15- minute music lessons which were included in the regular class of French second language. Daily lesson plans for both classes were prepared together by both teachers using the same educational materials and curriculum content. The results indicate that the group receiving the additional music lessons performed significantly better than the other group in all music tests and in the oral grammar and reading comprehension French tests, despite the principal emphasis on musical instruction. The results lead to the conclusion that the music and foreign languages study are mutually beneficial. In ESL classroom, Music has been used more extensively since teachers have more access to English songs. Such contact may make learning English in school easier if, as concluded by Lyczak (1979) that prior exposure to language affects successive learning, even if the exposure is not meaningful linguistically. For an extensive commercial ESL materials list using music.

The reason behind Cormier's (1985) research was to find out the extent of the link between music selected and French as second language variables. The study is made up of 79 students in grades 4, 5, and 6, who were enrolled in classes of French Immersion i.e. including music. Students were subjected to standardized tests for six days on music and reading, with French tests created by the researcher. The French variables include: retention of aural information, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, diction, language reading and imitation. The music variables include: tonal imagery, phrasing, rhythm imagery, pitch discrimination and music reading. This study found that the music variables are noteworthy predictors of the speech variables, meaning that music and speech are both aural expressions and may possess learning processes that is similar. It was finally concluded that there is a relationship between French second language

and music variables for grades four, five and six subjects taking mental ability into consideration. This is also supported by the Bruner (1960) and Gagné (1977) theories, which made the suggestion that transfer of learning occurs through similar elements, shared between subject areas. Medina (1990) stated that in the English vocabulary acquisition of second-grade, music effectiveness and story illustrations are limited English proficient students.

The vocabulary acquisition dependent variable was crossed with instructional medium (Music/No Music) and extra-linguistic support (Illustrations/No Illustrations). Mean vocabulary gain scores were consistently higher for music treatment groups and illustration groups after a treatment of four days. For the group that used both the music and illustrations, the vocabulary acquisition gain scores were highest. Data obtained one and a half weeks after treatment indicates that mean gain scores were still consistently higher for both music and illustrations combined effect. The study empirically provides support that music is a tool that is useful for the acquisition of second language.

Music and Pronunciation

Majority of the adults learn how to speak a foreign language with an accent derives partly from difference between phonological and phonetic of their native language (L1) and the target foreign language (L2). Music can be effective for the improvement of phonetic skills in different ways. Leith (1979) stated that there is probably not a better or quicker way of teaching phonetics other than with songs. Gatti-Taylor (1980) states that, It is relatively easy to find lyrics of songs suitable for a particular phoneme. García-Sáez (1984) agreed by stating that the use of song is a good way for practicing Spanish phonetics and it is not difficult at all to find songs' examples that entails sounds that the majority of students have problem in producing. To review pronunciation and enjoy music at the same time, the melody in combination with the lyrics provides an excellent opportunity. Texts that treat traditional pronunciation have emphasized that students need to strive for pronunciation that is perfect or near-native pronunciation.

Morely (1996) opposed that an important shift in instruction of language would be an unrealistic goal, now tends to emphasize a communicative focus: one that views the proper place of pronunciation in the L2 curriculum as an integral part of communication, not a separate drill-based component set aside from the mainstream of spoken discourse. Techmeier (1969) stated that the most difficult skill in learning a foreign language is proper pronunciation. He felt that if the child does not pronounce a word well, the problem may be that the child does not hear the word correctly.

Theoretical Framework

According to Schütz(2007) in drawing support from Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition, its fifth hypothesis of Affective filter aligns with second language acquisition as a result of motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. As Krashen posited, there are affective variables which play a non-causal, but rather facilitative role in second language acquisition. In this circumstance, high motivation is placed to be significant in equipping the learner for the second language acquisition. It is argued that motivation, among other affective filter variables build mental block which allows acquisition to take place. As explained in my personal experience in learning *BahasaMelayu* through the music of Nurhaliza, my love for music and the lyrical perfection of the singer's songs motivated me to remain lively and optimistic in learning the language.

On another hand, Krashen's view on the role of grammar in second language acquisition is also in order. According to him, the structure of the language has educational advantages and values, and therefore advocated for a concentrated learning of these structures as language appreciation moves. In view of second language learning through music, the vocabulary learnt from the music will be the first point of the language acquisition.

Methodology

The researcher Personal Experience

As an international student studying Master degree in Applied Linguistics atUniversiti Utara Malaysia, my experience, considering the effect of music in my learning of Malaysian language is interesting and worthy of sharing. It is in public knowledge that there are people who like music and love listening to songs. Music is great in entertainment and aids relaxation. Apart from being cool and fun, music has many positive effects on

our brain. It can also help us learn a new language –extant literatures as reviewed earlier pointed to this as well.

The researcher's experience:

"In my own experience, learning Malaysian language was catalysed through listening to Malaysian songs. Initially –after my registration into the University– I was staying in Tamansiswa(Jitra, Kedah); an accommodation exclusively meant for international students. Then, I used to have my lunch and dinner in a restaurant near to my home. One day, during Aidilfitri; a celebration for Muslims after the fasting month of Ramadhan, during my stay in this restaurant, I have overheard a nice music reportedly sung by a Malaysian lady. I couldn't understand the words of the song but I liked the music. I initially thought it is an Indian song. After questioning a worker in the restaurant, he told me it is a Malaysian song, sung by a famous female singer, whose name is Siti Nurhaliza. The song, as said, is about celebrating Aidilfitri. After getting home, I started searching for the song in the internet, and finally found it in YouTube. I decided to start watching the song with all other fascinating Malaysian songs. There, I started having interest in the learning of Bahasa Melayu; which is the official language of the Malaysian people. Another factor which encourages me to start learning and speaking the language was that I had the feelings that Malaysians are always in teaching foreigners their language."- Safaa A. Mohsin

Vocabularies acquired from the Nurhaliza's song are elicited below:

"di sana apakah, ertinya ,tangisan , rintihan, tiada ,henti ,alangkah hibany buminya bagai, ambil, duri, lebaranyang dinanti sanubari bernyanyi suci murni amlan dirahmati pekerti lahir batin sesuci sebersih lebaran bersalam bermaafan keampunan keberkatan berdendang ,sehalaman, berpanjangan ,yang malang jangan lupa ku syukuri murabban anugerah aidilfitri indahnya . mari ,puji ,memuji, kepada, tuhan ,titis kasihnya, melimpah ,seluruh ,alam Diciptakan ,seorang, insan, Lembut hati,menyaksikan kesyahduan, rasa, percaya, aduhai ,cuba, cari , hakikat ,Tatap, tidak ,ditatap.,Kotakan , dada, terdetik.,Temukan sang cinta.,Angin, pun, mula, bercerita, Semesta ,nyata terpedaya,Kekasih ,berbahasa.,Getir ,fikir derita, mengharap. Sesungguhnya, berkasihlah, antara ,manusia, Angin, lalu nyanyi, lagu rindu, tercurah ,sesama, di hening, keagungan, bergema, suara, moga moga, tua muda bantulah ,miskin ,hina"

Conclusion

With attached difficulty to the learning of any second language and the limitation of exclusive formal classroom settings, employment of song and teaching method involving music are said to be capable of instilling enough resilience that will stick in of the students and garner the needed experience to succeed with certain language structures. It is equally opined that since music features the target culture, it is capable of being understood without disengaging the listening enjoyment. This paper has been able to present qualitative literature justification to show the effect of music and song on the learning of second language. Also, the experience shared by the author is to practically support the literature claim from the review made.

As a conclusion, it can be safely stated that listening to songs is an interesting way to facilitate language learning, and it is encouraging for all second language learners to employ music as part of their learning tools. It gives powerful and long-lasting memory, and stimulates retentive future learning situations

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