



Social media and student learning behavior: Plugging into mainstream music offers dynamic ways to learn English



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 1 May 2014

Keywords:

Social media
YouTube
Mainstream music
Ubiquitous
Technology
Mobile device

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study demonstrates how social media enables mainstream English songs to be extended into the classroom as teaching material for learning English as a second language. Students thrive under such fun conditions and enjoyable activities, improving their listening skills and bettering their control of the English language by learning common, everyday phrases most useful for modern day English communication. The teaching procedure, approach and course of events during the learning activity is described. Researchers such as Berk (2009) emphasize the use of video clips from TV movies, YouTube, and mtvU in the classroom as a systematic teaching tool to improve learning in college courses. Similarly, this paper would like to advance the idea that learning English mainstream songs can be a ubiquitous form of learning since the involvement of technology is omnipresent, and the ease of implementing it into the classroom is readily attainable.

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1. Introduction

This study seeks to demonstrate how mainstream English contemporary songs when used as teaching material in the classroom provide a fun and stimulating context for learning English as a second language. A Singing Club course is designed for this study. These relatively new, enjoyable activities, available through YouTube media, enable students to improve their listening skills and better their control of the English language by learning common, everyday phrases that are especially useful to modern English communication. Researchers such as Berk (2009) emphasize using video clips, such as TV movies, YouTube, and mtvU in the college classroom. This paper, then, advances the idea that learning English songs offers students a ubiquitous form of learning where the involvement of technology is omnipresent.

Taking a 'musical' approach when learning not only stimulates the mind but also increases learning performance when the teaching material interests the learner as well. Instructors chose mainly mainstream music for the Singing Club course because mainstream music, according to the definition provided by Wikipedia (Wikipedia: mainstream music, n.d.), is "music which is popular to the masses." This term defines the selection of songs for the Singing Club Course project, and due to the fact that students

enjoyed these songs more than others, and that instructors also wanted to make the course fun yet educational as possible, these songs became the core material of the course.

Additionally, modern western culture is extremely well conveyed through this particular medium, especially contemporary pop confections. Students in fact grasp the clear and immediate idea of the fads and trends in the language, music, art and fashion of today.

Both research and analysis of students' papers have demonstrated the success of students of the Singing Club project who responded to changes in their approach to English language learning. Instructors during this protocol found it easier to pinpoint pupils' problems and helpful changes were made and instructors discovered themselves able to aid learners in whichever particular area that needed improvement. However, quite a few changes still could be made to this program and, naturally, there is room for improvement, all of which is discussed below.

2. Teaching and modifying methodology

The study aimed to teach students various English vocabulary, sentence structures, and cultural references using contemporary American popular culture. Learning involves both "Push" and "Pull" – through mobile-assisted language learning, such as YouTube, "information is made available to learners without effort on their part" (Stockwell, 2012a,b). We know that technology encourages student motivation in English language teaching and

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learning (Stockwell, 2013), and according to Bax (2003), technology is “in every classroom, on every desk, in every bag.” Under these successful circumstances where pleasure encourages motivation, students first learn the songs and then, listening to the songs on smart phones on their own time, they choose to “exploit small amounts of time and space for learning” (Kukulska-Hulme, Traxler, & Pettit, 2007).

The selected teaching procedure and approach appeared to generate mainly positive results. Naturally, certain variables, such as the choice of songs underwent adjustment to suit the students’ personal interests and musical tastes. The duration of the project ran for 10 weeks, from November 2, 2012 to January 7, 2013.

The course of events during two particularly significant classes is described below. Students were asked to find the selected songs on YouTube, or to download them onto their smartphones. This method proved conducive as it enabled students to recognize how mobile devices permit them to learn ubiquitously (Stockwell & Stockwell, 2012). Those songs, laden by dense vocabulary, required instructors to provide students with Chinese translations and English definitions for difficult words. Students’ handouts were collected and analyzed according to phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, errors, and so forth. All data presented in this paper have been accumulated from the songs that are mentioned below. Songs utilized in the classroom that appear in this study but are not mentioned below include: “If I Die Young” by the Band Perry and “Always Be My Baby” by Mariah Carey.

Songs chosen and Explained:

1. “Seasons in the Sun” (Westlife).
2. “How to be Dead” (Snow Patrol).
3. “Dustland Fairytale” (The Killers).
4. “We Are Never Getting Back Together” (Taylor Swift).
5. “Skyfall” (Adele).

2.1. Process of teaching

Students were presented with several sheets of paper on which were printed some of the lyrics of the songs. Portions of the lyrics were removed, and students were asked to fill in the blank spots with words they heard while listening. Students were told not to leave blank spaces during the exercise and to fill in all of the spaces provided to the best of their ability. Additionally they were to leave previously written answers as they were, not changing their original response. This request not to change a first response allowed the instructor(s) to analyze the students’ initial abilities to hear different words and to adjust their teaching methods accordingly.

First each song was played once, and students were allowed to ask questions pertaining to the missing vocabulary that might help them find the right word for each blank. After the second playing of the song, discussion and teaching of the lyrics was performed, and certain phrases and vocabulary were defined and further clarified. Finally, the song was played a third time, and the students were asked to sing along, albeit very softly.

According to students feedback and through classroom observation, this genre of the first three songs seemed not to appeal to most of the students since most of the songs were slow in tempo and rhythm or lacked a mainstream pop quality. The exercise ultimately functioned more like an assignment and less like an activity to be enjoyed.

2.2. Everyday English used in the songs

Below is a list of some common expressions and words used in the songs that teachers introduced into the classroom. These

expressions occur in everyday English as well. Culturally speaking, the music video showed students a rustic America (American Midwest and South). Cultural reference to “moon river” was discussed (Movie: *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*).

“Seasons in the Sun”:

Spring is in the air, black sheep, get my feet back on the ground

“How to Be Dead”:

Blanket, freezing, darling, sweetheart, to raise your voice, suggestion, to shoulder the blame, take it easy, to step over lines, to draw lines, wit, Jekyll & Hyde, pride

“Dustland Fairytale”:

Fairytale, white trash, county, foolish, slick, chrome, serenade, Cinderella, nightgown, devil, showdown, disguise, revelation, to sink, poison, castle, vandalize, valley, refuge, kingdom, siege, cadence

“We Are Never Getting Back Together”:

To pretend to, to fake –ing, to swear, to pick a fight, to find fault, genre, indie, record, popular culture/pop culture, the origin of the word “pop music,” usage of the word “like,” retard, retarded, ridiculous, exhausting

“Skyfall”:

To hold your breath (students advised to exercise caution in differentiating ‘breath’ from ‘breast.’), burst, to drown, dreamed/dreamt (pronunciation), overdue, to owe, to sweep away (swept), to crumble, crumb(s), to stand tall, a thousand miles and poles apart, to collide, security, to keep someone from harm

2.3. Classifications of terms in the songs

Below is a possible set of classifications, organized around linguistic terms (idiom, derogatory speech, neologism: i.e. indie (artists working outside commercial mainstream), regional space (American West), and historical time period (medieval), which helps group the expressions and words listed in the songs above.

- Idiom: spring is in the air (hint of improvement, often in a romantic context); black sheep (outsider of an intimate group, for example, a family); get my feet back on the ground (to become stable, to become oriented); to shoulder the blame (accept the responsibility of a bad context); to take it easy (to accept relaxation); Jekyll & Hyde (alarming oppositional change); to pick a fight (to be belligerent); to raise your voice (to become incensed, angered).
- American western terms: showdown (an eventual confrontation, for example in card playing or gun fighting); darling, sweetheart (male terms for the endearing, loveable, cherished female, such as “sweetheart of the rodeo”); to pick a fight (to be belligerent, provocative); to swear (to use forceful, socially unacceptable speech); county (division of American state into a smaller divisions of land); serenade (cowboy’s song accompanied by guitar to his sweetheart).
- Medieval terms: castle (stone fortress); siege (wage war against a city or a populace); kingdom (the realm or land governed by the king); fairytale (imaginative story possibly involving good and evil forces, often in medieval setting); Cinderella (the impoverished beautiful girl who becomes belatedly after struggle a princess—from cinder, the girl who cleans ashes).

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