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THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC ON PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of music activities on learning foreign languages. Though music and language have been treated as different psychological faculties, scientists has proved that music effects deeply to improve student's speaking .In this article the scientists views on improving students' pronunciation through the songs are studied. They stated that music can be effective means in improving phonetic skills in a variety of ways: the melody, combined with the lyrics, provides an excellent opportunity to review pronunciation and enjoy music at the same time.

KEY WORDS: foreign language, native language, improving phonetic skills, phonetic differences, pronunciation, song, practice, students, difference, develop, hearing skills, perfect pronunciation, native pronunciation, articulation, semantic comprehension, effectiveness cognitive skills, musical ability, traditional method, language production, intonation, sound pronunciation

INTRODUCTION:

Most adults who learn a foreign language speak with an accent which derives in part from phonological and phonetic differences between their native language (L1) and the target foreign language (L2). Music can be effective in improving phonetic skills in a variety of ways. Leith (1979) stated, "There is probably not a better nor quicker way to teach phonetics than with songs" (p. 540). Gatti-Taylor (1980) believed that phonetic instruction was one good use to which songs could be put, even in beginning classes, stating, "It is relatively easy to find song lyrics that stress a particular phoneme" (p. 466). Garcia-Saez (1984) agreed stating, "the use of song is an excellent way to practice Spanish phonetics and it is not at all difficult to find examples of songs that contain sounds the majority of students have trouble producing" (p. 4). The melody, combined with the lyrics, provides an excellent opportunity to review pronunciation and enjoy music at the same time.

METHOD:

Traditional pronunciation texts have emphasized or implied that students should strive for perfect pronunciation or near-native pronunciation. Morely (1996) contended that this would be an unrealistic goal, an important shift in language instruction 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" (p. 151). 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. According to Techmeier, as well as Urbanic and Vizmuller (1981), singing helped to develop better hearing skills and, as a result, promoted and reinforced good articulation of words. Poliquin (1988) suggested that the particular value and effectiveness of using songs in language

instruction, was specifically to improve pronunciation skills. He explained that semantic comprehension is controlled by the left brain and that musical tones and rhythm are controlled by the right. He therefore encouraged the pedagogical use of songs to develop cognitive skills, to demonstrate the relationship of language rhythm and song rhythm, and to teach a second or third language. Karimer (1994) formulated a study using ESL students to find out if acquiring a native-like fluency would be faster using nursery rhymes, chants and songs. Students were Southeastern Asian adults, who were divided into ethnic groups. This division was made since the Lao Hmong group's culture practiced a courtship ritual requiring the man to look for two qualities in a wife, sewing and singing. The man sang an original love song to his intended, who then responded by matching his intonation patterns exactly. No difference was noted with this nationality since only three subjects from this group remained in the final results. The subjects' task was to distinguish between minimal pairs defined as two words that differ in one phoneme only-for example "fill/pill, buzz/bus." Both groups were given a pre-test that distinguished between phoneme sounds, then they were given a treatment consisting of 20 minutes of instruction, twice a week, and over a two week period. The control group was asked to listen to a word list of 10 minimal pairs, while the experimental group was asked to listen to various songs and rhythmic chants which presented the same sounds contextually. The students were given a post-test similar to the pre-test after the two week period. An advantage in test scores was seen in the experimental group. Since the control group had tested higher on the pre-test, the improvement scores were used to compare between the groups. The improvement score for the control group was 3.9 while the experimental, songs and chant group gained 10 points. These results indicated a definite advantage for the experimental group, after only two weeks of treatment. In addition to the rhythm of the language, what might have been a important factor in this case was contextual learning, or learning the use of a language as it naturally occurs. Eterno (1961), in a study of Spanish pronunciation and musical aptitude, found a direct relationship between musical aptitude and/or musical training and foreign language pronunciation. This might suggest that although teachers present the material to a group of students, those who (perhaps unknowingly) have a musical aptitude may be more affected by language when that language is presented in song form. Arellano and Draper (1975) considered 79 students in fifth grade, who had experienced previous exposure to Spanish. Subjects were tested on 15 variables. Researchers viewed the relationship between discriminatory abilities pitch, intensity, rhythm, timbre, and tonal memory-and the capacity to achieve in the area of Spanish accent and Spanish language comprehension. Overall results indicated musical ability and Spanish accent were strongly correlated, even when the possible common relationship with I. Q. was taken into consideration. Researchers concluded that the close relationship found to exist between musical ability and second language learning may suggest that the learning of music and second language can be mutually reinforcing. Scovel (1969) discussed the relationship between cerebral dominance and a speaker's accent. He states that the onset of cerebral dominance, which seems to occur around the age of twelve, inhibits the ability of a person to master the sound patterns of a second language without an impinging foreign accent. He believes that adults cannot master the sound patterns of a second language with the fluency of a native speaker. The basis for this opinion is the fact that children learn

language in a different way-with actual objects in the environment and their names, the largest being visual-auditory and tactile-auditory association. When adults learn a second language, it is primarily done by translating from the first language, i.e., by auditory-auditory associations, not by dealing directly with the environment. Different anatomical regions are used in the two cases. Speakers in Scovel's study (1969) were asked to say a simple sentence twice. The listeners, junior high school students, were able to judge whether the speakers were native born Americans with an 85% accuracy. His point is that speakers must achieve a native accent before the age of twelve or they will never be able to sound native. He presents the possibility that it is the nature of the brain, specifically the phenomenon called cerebral dominance or lateralization that accounts for the ability of children to learn languages fluently. He states that there is strong circumstantial evidence that the maturational development of cerebral dominance is closely linked to the ability to acquire language. He believes it is nature, not nurture, which determines our ability to speak without a foreign accent.

What he pointed out as the different ways that children learn a language, and different anatomical regions used in learning, may well be attributed to nurture in the way that adults are taught. The traditional method has been to teach adults using the first language as the foundation. Perhaps we could teach adults with actual objects in the environment, as well as allow them the same listening period (Kadota, 1987; Postovsky, 1974) or silent period (Krashen, 1985) that is present under natural acquisition circumstances where they hear the native sounds until they are ready to produce speech. Evidence for pronunciation factors was given by Elliot (1995), who tested 12 variables believed to be related to pronunciation accuracy, but found only three that related significantly to pronunciation accuracy. These were; (a) attitude or individual concern for pronunciation, (b) subjects' degree of Field Independence (FI), and (c) subject's degree of right hemisphere specialization. Field Independent (FI) individuals were analytical, reflective, highly detailed, ambiguity-tolerant, and left-cerebrally-dominant. They often maintain social distance. Field Dependent (FD) individuals were more globally oriented, impulsive, holistic, and right-cerebrally-dominant. They tend to be outgoing, empathetic, and perceptive. As for language acquisition, FI individuals did better at written tasks, learning grammar rules and manipulation of linguistic forms, while FD individuals would prefer speaking. He suspected FD individuals would have better pronunciation since they were more social and interested in communication. However, FI individuals tended to have better pronunciation. No reason was suggested for this, but it may be due to FI individuals' tendency to high detail and a preference to analyze the sounds. What Scovel (1969) termed cerebral dominance, Elliot (1995) called hemispheric specialization, but both referred to which side of the brain was more likely to be used for individual cognitive learning styles and preferences. "The left hemisphere is better at such tasks as reading, speaking, analytical reasoning, and arithmetic. The right side is better at spatial tasks, recognizing faces, and music. It is commonly believed that the left hemisphere is primarily responsible for language production and comprehension, although the right is responsible for the analysis of voice intonation, as well as for deciphering linguistic pitch and rhythm" (p. 358). Elliot's results suggested that "although Field Independence and Right hemisphere specialization related to

accurate target language pronunciation in certain tasks, attentiveness or concern for pronunciation accuracy proved to be the most significant factor" (p. 356). The total number of years of formal instruction in Spanish also had a small effect on pronunciation, but the most significant predictor of pronunciation accuracy was attitude (speaker's desire to pronounce correctly). It seems that using music to bridge the hemispheres may be the necessary connection between language comprehension controlled by the left side and pitch, intonation, and rhythm controlled by the right side. If instruction is focused on language form only, then students may lack the fine tuning skills of pronunciation including pitch discrimination. Improving students' pronunciation through the sounds heard in song may be an answer to Scovel's (1969) statement that adults can never acquire a native-like accent. Listening to the natural sounds and features of the sung language may be one possible reason why comments are often made by listeners that they presumed I was a native Spanish speaker, although I am a native of Louisiana. Pimsleur, Stockwell, and Comrey (1962) reported over forty research studies pertaining to the factors within students which bear upon their abilities to learn a foreign language. One of the important sub-headings of that review was devoted to studies dealing specifically with the relationship of the ability fordiscriminating pitch to the ability for learning a foreign language. Early work from Dexter (1934) had shown a viable connection between pitch discrimination and accent rating; interestingly "the correlation of pitch with accent increases as age of subject decreases" (p. 717). Both studies (Dexter, 1934 and Pimsleur, Stockwell, & Comrey, 1962) confirmed the trend of significant correlations between pitch discrimination and various criterion measures of achievement in several foreign languages on the high school and college, as well as intensive course (Army Language School) levels. Correlations between pitch discrimination and foreign language achievement are largest in high school, the lowest level in these studies; the correlations became progressively smaller as the individual proceeded through college and intensive course levels. These correlation changes may be due to the change in teaching methods used for the older learner. To examine the relationship between pitch discrimination and accent, Arellano and Draper (1972) gave 79 children a six-week period of audio-lingual instruction. There was no exposure to written Spanish. Each child, 10 years of age, received 30 minutes of instruction per day in Spanish. In keeping with the age and relatively limited attention span of the subjects, a teaching approach built around games, songs, rhymes, and "The Three Bears" folktale was pursued in all classwork. Results indicate that musical ability and Spanish accent achievement are strongly related, even when their common relationship with I. Q. is taken into consideration. "The rather close relationship found to exist between certain musical acuities and Spanish learning in young subjects suggests the possibility that music and second-language learning may, during early childhood and over a protracted time period, be mutually reinforcing" (p. 114). The numerous benefits of song have been extolled by the research studies summarized in the previous chapters, as well as by foreign language teachers.

CONCLUSION:

Nuessel and Cicogna (1991) sum up the pedagogical techniques that utilize song and music implementation as a medium for "pronunciation, morphological or syntactic patterns, vocabulary-building, and cultural aspects, to name but a few possibilities. A song constitutes an ideal text that is admirably

suited to a multiplicity of learning/acquisition activities carried out in the language classroom" (pp 476-477).The benefit of song has been promoted by discussing the findings of this research study in the areas of text recall and involuntary mental rehearsal. In addition, student comments from questionnaires done by Gatti-Taylor (1980) offered a view of what students believed to be the benefit of songs in the curriculum. All students agreed that the association of words and music made memorizing less difficult. Most said that the music added enjoyment to class meetings: "It created a pleasantness that was always present. A number of students volunteered remarks to the effect that they played the songs at home, or that they occasionally found themselves spontaneously singing the refrains in the course of their daily routines" (p. 468). Purcell (1992), said that the benefits of song even resound in the songs themselves. As the last refrain from the famous folksong reminds, porque ,cantando se alegran, cielito lindo, los corazones (because by singing hearts aremade glad)" (p. 196).

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