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## PROMOTING FUN LEARNING IN GRAMMAR CLASS THROUGH SONGS

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### **Abstract**

Many teachers present grammar in a conventional way. The rules are taught in a very formal situation with monotonous activities. Many times they need repetition to make students really understand about a topic, especially when they teach tenses. It is important for students to be able to distinguish each type of them. This brings about students' boredom and discourages them to get involved, so that unconscious learning doesn't occur. However, songs promote relaxed, enchanted atmosphere in classrooms. Furthermore, songs are perceived to stimulate students' interest in learning. By having that fun, conducive learning atmosphere, students may feel excited in joining grammar class. This paper aims at providing basic conceptual arguments of the advantage of using songs in teaching grammar. It also discusses the pedagogical implication of utilizing songs to create joyful class. The procedure of teaching grammar through songs is then proposed.

**Keywords:** fun learning, song, learning grammar

### **Introduction**

Grammar is defined as a set of forms and rules on how a language is used. Brown (2001:362) says that it is "the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence". It explains what language users have to do or don't have to dealing with the language itself. Since there are so many rules in English grammar, some teachers think too much on how to

teach all of them in the class. These formal rules then, many times trap them to focus on form only. Drills and repetition are common activities following lecturing or other conventional teaching techniques. Those traditional ways of teaching grammar that is full of diagramming sentences and memorizing part of speech really discourages students to learn. And the most important goal of teaching grammar which enables students to use the rules in communication tasks is then ignored. It commonly happens if teachers focus on form and do not provide context. Furthermore, these monotonous learning activities do make students bored that they are not intrinsically motivated to engage in the class.

When learners do not actively involve, language acquisition seems impossible to happen. However, unconscious learning is very essential. It is strongly influenced by input, as Krashen (1987) claimed that "human acquire language only in one way – by understanding messages or by receiving comprehensible input". This input is slightly beyond the students' level of competence, which is challenging but easy enough for students to understand. For teachers, it is a challenge for them to present comprehensible input in teaching grammar in which the class atmosphere is conducive and supports the acquisition to occur with attractive materials to learn.

To have effective teaching learning process, appropriate techniques should be selected based on the following criteria:

1. embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts
2. contribute positively to communicative goals
3. promote accuracy within fluent, communicative language
4. do not overwhelm students with linguistic terminology
5. are as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible (Brown, 2001: 363)

Based on the criteria stated above, songs potentially promote not only communicative teaching learning but also initiate students to have fun learning. By having relaxed, enchanted atmosphere in classrooms, songs stimulate students' interest in learning. Therefore, through this conducive learning atmosphere, students may feel excited in joining grammar class.

## Reasons for Using Songs

Schoepp (<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Schoepp-Songs.html>) and Grau (2012) mentioned three important reasons for using song to teach grammar. They are affective, cognitive, and linguistic reasons.

### 1. Affective Reason

The affective reason is adopted from Kreshen's theory about the affective filter hypothesis. Kreshen (1987) says that there are some affective factors influencing the process of language acquisition, they are motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Students who have higher motivation, better self-confidence and lower anxiety will facilitate them to get successful unconscious learning. The affective filter becomes positive support for language acquisition if the class atmosphere is not threatening and can make students relaxed. Songs have numerous entertaining features covering the melody, rhyme and the lyrics. Furthermore, Eken (1996: 46) states that songs can be used:

- a. To present a topic, a language point, lexis, etc.
- b. To practice a language point, lexis, etc.
- c. To focus on common learner errors in a more direct way
- d. To encourage extensive and intensive listening
- e. To stimulate discussion of attitudes and feelings
- f. To encourage creativity and use of imagination
- g. To provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere
- h. To bring variety and fun to learning

Through songs, it is very possible for teachers to build learners' affection towards English learning. If it is so, further process of acquisition will run more smoothly since they feel free without any burden of compulsion. This positive attitude should be maintained by providing fun learning experience, such as games after discussing a topic presented through songs. Don't forget to invite them to be more actively participate in the class. Expressing their feeling and opinion is a good way to make them involved and later on can trigger intrinsic motivation for the joy of learning English.

## 2. Cognitive Reason

Songs often have repeated words or sentences in the lyrics. For example, the song entitled *Haven't met you yet* by Michael Buble, has several times of repeated sentences written in present perfect tense. Through this repetition, songs provide listeners with automaticity to English rules. Almost all learners including young, teenage and adults love listening to music and enjoy pronouncing the lyric. This activity prominently develops automaticity to the language in entertaining atmosphere. Furthermore, listening to songs is the most practical listening activity that teachers can design. It may become the initial step of developing learners' English competence. Also, it positively develops thinking skills.

## 3. Linguistic Reason

Songs provide numerous sources for teaching all English skills covering listening, reading, speaking and writing. They also can be used as rich materials to teach language components, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The song *Everything at Once* by Lenka, for instance, contains a lot of adjectives and can be authentic example to teach comparison degree. Here is one of the lyrics:

*As sly as a fox, as **strong** as an ox*  
*As **fast** as a hare, as **brave** as a bear*  
*As **free** as a bird, as **neat** as a word*  
*As **quiet** as a mouse, as **big** as a house*

After explaining the rule of comparison degree, we can extend to have writing or speaking activities. It is essential to do because students need to experience themselves in applying the rule in real communication as the function of language itself. For intermediate level, learners are asked to write a descriptive or narrative text that integrates grammar rules and constructing ideas. Thus, they are able not only to express their ideas but

also to produce grammatically correct sentences. Although, the process takes more time than that indigramming sentences, the result will stay longer in their memory. In writing, editing and revising must be done and through these steps, learners apply the rules learned in grammar class.

Besides writing skill, speaking could be another way in integrating grammar rules. Learners can be trained to respond orally about the message delivered in the song lyrics. This will be more attractive by making use of pictures.

Since songs have poetic features consisting of beautiful words arrangement, the joy of aesthetic value can be felt as well as the discussion of the linguistic features. The table below lists a number of songs that can be used to teach grammar which I compile from some sources.

Topic	songs
Simple present tense	<i>Wonderful tonight</i> by Eric Clapton <i>Fix You</i> by Coldplay <i>Things I'll never say</i> by Avril Lavigne
Simple past tense	<i>Because you loved me</i> by Celine Dion
Present perfect tense	<i>Haven't met you yet</i> by Michael Buble <i>We are the champions</i> by Queen
Present continuous tense	<i>Lemon tree</i> by Fool's Garden <i>Things I'll never say</i> by Avril Lavigne <i>Sailing</i> by Rod Stewart
Past continuous tense	<i>Cryin'</i> by Aerosmith <i>Jealous Guy</i> by John Lennon
Present perfect continuous tense	<i>Since I've Been Loving You</i> by Led Zeppelin
Past perfect tense	<i>My Girl</i> by Madness
Used to	<i>This Used To Be My Playground</i> by Madonna
Going to future	<i>We're Going To Be Friends</i> by Jack Johnson
will future	<i>I Will Survive</i> by Gloria Gaynor <i>Break away</i> by Kelly Clarkson

(<http://teftunes.com/grammarsongs.aspx>)

Besides those three reasons, there are some more advantages contributed by songs in teaching grammar as Lynch (<http://www.eslbase.com/articles/songs->) claimed as the following:

- Songs are usually easily accessible

It is very easy to obtain songs especially through the internet access. We can use cassettes, CDs, DVDs or download MP3 from the internet.

- Songs can be selected to match students' need and interest

There are many kinds of songs with different topics that can be used as learning sources. They can be selected based on learning objectives and level of difficulty. Another consideration is students' interest. Adults usually have different interest in songs' genre from teenagers.

- Songs can be used to develop cultural awareness

Culture can be introduced to students through songs. This can be done by discussing the theme of the song or asking them to respond to what is told in the lyric. Further discussion may go on to comparing one culture to another.

- Time allocation is easily controlled

Whether songs are taught in 30 minutes or one hour, it depends on us. It is related to the learning objective we want to achieve which is realized through learning activities.

- Songs provide more various accents

Songs are sung by numerous people around the world who have typical accent representing their regions. Through their pronunciation, students can experience how American and British English differ.

- Songs lyric can be used to relate the situation of around us

Songs are composed as writers' reflection of their thought or feelings to things happen around them. There are many songs about war, peace, love and others describing completely about phenomena occur in this world.

### **The Procedure of Teaching Grammar Using Song**

Before teaching, generally teachers design the lesson plan which stating the learning objective. Later they design the learning

source, in this case using songs. Therefore the songs should be selected to satisfy the goal. There are some ways to teach grammar as Saricoban&Metin (2000) mentioned as the following:

- Gap fills or close texts
- Focus questions
- True-false statements
- Put these lines into the correct sequence
- Dictation
- Add a final verse
- Circle the antonyms/synonyms of the given words
- Discuss

In maximizing the use of songs to teach grammar, it should be presented integratedly into productive skills i.e.: speaking and writing. Effective learning is when the knowledge is put in practice. Therefore, after students understand the rule, it is very important for teachers to provide follow up activities which explore their speaking and writing. Here I propose some activities to do in a grammar class adopted from Saricoban & Metin (2000).

### **1. Pre-listening activity**

In this phase, teachers prepare some words or phrases taken from the song lyrics. Students may be asked to pronounce together and find out the meaning. You also could present pictures to attract students' attention and focus them to the topic. On the other hand, it is useful to activate their background knowledge and become a bridge connecting to the new material.

### **2. Listening activity**

Before presenting the song, it is strongly recommended to tell the students about the teaching objective first. It is important for them to know what they are going to do that builds their awareness of their learning. Some worksheet should be provided to guide the students in doing the instruction. They could have gap filling or true false statement or other appropriate techniques depending on the teaching goal. However, the most frequent technique used is gap filling. After presenting the song, teachers can show the grammar point and discuss it. Sev-



eral oral practices may follow to check students' understanding. Through this indirect drill, inductively students can draw conclusion to what they have learned.

### **3. Follow up activity**

In this phase, teachers can give wider opportunity to students to explore the message or story in which the songs contain through speaking or writing activity. Sharing opinion or having group discussion may invite students' involvement to express their ideas. This also can be done by writing their opinions as a response to the topic discussed. In addition, cultural aspects of songs possibly become an interesting theme to concern in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

As pointed out, the reasons for using songs to teach grammar are clarified. There should be no doubt anymore for us about the benefits of songs to be utilized in our classes since songs not only provide relaxed atmosphere but also intrinsically motivate students to learn. To have effective usage, various activities should be creatively designed to engage students' involvement in the class.

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