

The Specificity of Using Modern Songs in Teaching English to First-Year Students at Ukrainian Universities

Svitlana Shekhavtsova

Department of Romance and Germanic Philology at
Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University
Ukraine

Olena Byndas

Department of Romance and Germanic Philology at
Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University
Ukraine

Viktoriiia Dmytrenko

Department of Ukrainian and World Literature at
Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University
Ukraine

Abstract

This study provides a theoretical and methodological basis for the use of modern songs in teaching English to first-year students, the development of an exercise system, its practical implementation, and the results of testing the effectiveness of this experiment. The relevance of the research is due to the high interest of young people, and first-year students as well, in learning English using modern songs, and the lack of sophistication of the technologies used to teach English to them. The analysis of the psychological and pedagogical features of the first-year students made it possible to conclude that this is an aging period of sharp contradictions in the structure of the personality, that is being formed. It requires a particular pedagogical and methodical skill from the teacher. Some tasks are solved while using the experimental investigation: implementing and testing the effectiveness of the exercises system. The analysis and synthesis of methodological literature, together with our results, showed that the use of modern songs in English classes is an effective method to master the language. It also helps to increase the productivity of the educational process.
Keywords: first-year students, implement, modern songs, a system of exercises, test, English teaching, Ukrainian universities

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Introduction

The Goal in Teaching English at Ukrainian Universities

Higher educational institutions of Ukraine prefer traditional forms of educational process organization. The curriculum limits the teacher in time, so the urgent problem for educators is to diversify the learning process.

The relevance of the research is due to the high interest of young people, and first-year students as well, in learning English using modern songs, and the lack of sophistication of the technologies used to teach English to them. The introduction of texts of the songs in the educational process helps expand the vocabulary of the first-year students, develops a sense of language, memory, thinking, and teaches the basics of translation. Besides, this activity evokes positive emotions and feelings of relaxation, first-year students master the language without straining, which makes learning exciting and desirable. The use of this method in English lessons will further immerse itself in the culture of the country. After all, the need to fill the content of education with sociocultural aspects is a significant task at the European and national levels (Shekhavtsova, 2018).

The proposed paper aims to justify scientifically, to implement, and to test the effectiveness of the use of modern songs in teaching English to first-year students at Ukrainian universities.

The achievement of this goal leads to solving the following tasks: 1) to determine the function of songs in English learning; 2) to analyze psychophysiological peculiarities of learning English by first-year students; 3) to describe the use of songs in English lessons as a technique for developing the language competence of first-year students 4) to create a system of exercises based on modern English songs for the formation of language competence of first-year students; 5) to implement and to test the effectiveness of the exercises system.

Theoretical Background of the Research

The Importance of Songs in Learning English

The concept of "language learning" has an incredibly comprehensive meaning and includes language acquisition without systematic learning. The central part of such assimilation occurs without systematic training due to simple imitation, repetition, and use in daily communication. Such a natural, unmanaged, and friendly way of learning should not be ignored. Foreign language teachers can use the methodologies associated with it when planning lessons. From a biological point of view, the right hemisphere corresponds to the perception of intuition, movement, color, and music. Therefore, vocabulary, combined with music, is memorized more quickly and for a more extended period than when using exclusively the verbal, mathematical, and logical left hemisphere of the brain (Vasylenko, 2014). Sensitively, educators have used the choral repetition of texts and songs for centuries to observe its effectiveness in practice. Neurolinguistic studies have confirmed the likelihood of practical experience (Ryzhova, 2011). Together with melody and text, both brain hemispheres work together for memorizing. Also, the combination of song and the rhyming book emphasizes the natural rhythm of the language, its melody, which is extremely important when playing it.

In the English lesson, songs are most commonly used for phonetic charging at the initial stage of the class; for stronger remembering of lexical and grammatical material; as an incentive for the development of language skills.

The authors distinguish nine essential functions of the song that lie in the concept of teaching English: - psychological (memory enhancing); - communicative; - cognitive (providing students with cultural and general information); - psycho-hygienic (develops an interest in music at the level of pleasure); - mood function, expression of emotions and feelings; - socio-psychological (enhances cohesion in groups, class); - functions of name of cognitive processes; - the role of unconscious learning of foreign languages; - the part of solving communicative problems.

Therefore, from the method, a song in English can be considered, on the one hand, as an example of sounding a foreign language, adequately reflect the peculiarities of life, culture, and life of the people of the country being studied, on the other hand, being a bearer of cultural information, a song can also form student's spiritual culture, unite his mind and soul into one. More than that, every foreign word reflects the culture, and each story is conditioned by the national consciousness of the world (Byndas, 2018). It can be concluded that the song is a very versatile art. It enriches the person, reveals his/her creative potential, and improves the quality of the language.

Psychophysiological Peculiarities of First-Year Students in English Language Learning

The relevance of the study of psychological aspects of mastering a foreign language derives from the content of the professional training of students of psychological and linguistic specialties, which provides in-depth knowledge of the psychological features of mastering the language.

Vedel (2003) divides the whole process of mastering a foreign language in learning into two main stages. The first stage is the stage of indirect possession mediated through the mother tongue; it can also be called a set of translation. The second stage is the stage of direct or indirect possession, characterized by establishing a direct link between a foreign language and thinking, which eliminates the need for translation (Vedel, 2003).

The above-characterized divergence of the two main ways of mastering a foreign language is very important and significant. After all, while learning a foreign language, there are often cases when students are in the first stage of mastering the language for a very long time. In most cases, students of language universities indicate that they experienced a turning point in foreign language proficiency only at the end of the second year of studying (Lozova, 2010).

The communicative development of the first-year students is characterized by the formation and improvement of the mechanism of language means selection, ways of forming, and formulating thoughts. An individual style of speech develops (Vetokhov, 2002).

The first-year students combine the traits of a young person and the characteristics of maturity. It dialectically combines unlost childhood with displays of adulthood. The first-year student has already developed certain principles of behavior, forms an image of his or herself and values. The differentiation of interests is manifested (James, 1972).

Using Songs in English Classes as a Technique for Students' Language Skills Training

Songs are often not regarded as a critical element of the learning process, are only considered as a way of relaxation (Polenok, 2009). Working at a piece develops listening and translation skills, as the music touches on vital issues, it introduces vocabulary to the communicative function. The advantage of using songs in a foreign language lesson is that the themes help to more efficiently and firmly absorb and expand the lexical stock, as the song lyrics include new words and expressions. Familiar vocabulary meets in a new contextual environment, which contributes to its activation.

For instance, Sting's song *Englishman in New York* reflects the habit of Englishmen drinking tea at the same time in the afternoon; it says about their mannerism. The lyrics of the English songs are rich in factual information; it will be remembered easily and for a long time. All this contributes to the development of students' sense of language, familiarity with stylistic features. The song, like any artistic text, gives "live" grammatical constructions, that is, grammar in action (Diachenko, 2004; Gebel, 2009; Gordeeva, 2013).

The complex memorization of song lyrics is facilitated by factors such as rhyme, tune, and melody. Numerous repetitions contribute to the smooth and involuntary memorization of lexical and grammatical constructions, thus increasing the efficiency of learning (Hancock, 1998).

An essential step in work is self-control, which activates the feedback mechanism, enhances students' responsibility, optimizes their language acquisition, and as a consequence, improves motivation and achievement significantly. The use of songs in the language that is studying continues to be relevant in the first year of university studying for the following reasons: - song materials are diverse (not only in content but also in terms of the content of linguistic information).

Methods and Materials of Research

The method and technique of using each song involve the preliminary introduction, activation, and consolidation of vocabulary.

We can follow the sequence of work with the song: 1) build associative ideas by the name and content of the song. Short introductory words about the music (its character, style, main content, history of creation, etc.), installation on the first perception of the song; 2) check the assumptions made about the content of the song; 3) phonetic reproduction of the song text while playing sounds, words, and phrases; practicing melodies and stresses in expressions; mastering a clear pronunciation by repeating the words with the speaker and after the speaker. At the initial stage of learning a foreign language, it is advisable to use a simulation method for these purposes; 4) work on grammar: exercising to fill in the blanks or to use the correct verbs in the English text can serve as an example of working out grammar and checking the correctness of the task by listening to a song. In addition to verbs, you can do exercises to work out all types of questions in English, the use of prepositions, degrees of comparison of adjectives, etc.; 4) relistening to the song; work at this stage is advisable to carry out with emphasis on text; 5) reading the lyrics of the song with further processing of sounds and intonation, all work is also recommended to be carried out with emphasis on the words; 6) learning the tune in the process of performing a song together

using the song's phonogram; 7) work with the content of the piece: answer the teacher's questions about the content of the song; 8) post-text stage: singing songs without a speaker; 9) the task of memorizing the words of the song. For many students, learning words in a foreign language is a serious problem, so this stage needs special attention. The best way to remember new words is to repeat the comments after the speaker and to speak with him; 10) learn the lyrics of the song and perform individually.

Besides, there are other effective ways to memorize the lyrics of the English song: "*Complete the phrase*" – there is a beginning of the phrase from the song on the blackboard, students' task is to finish it. "*Snowball*" – each student repeats the previous sentence and says his or her own. "*Chain*" – each student utters one line from the verse and so on until the end of the song. "*Order the lines*" – the teacher divides the class into two teams and gives each team an envelope with a song cut into lines. The task of each team is to combine the lyrics of the song in English as soon as possible.

For higher motivation, students can arrange a competition for the best song performance – listening, analyzing, performing – it is a group activity, collaboration between side members, helping to overcome a stressful situation, barriers in communication, which prevent students from learning the language effectively (Petrovska, 2018; Krukivska, 1998 & Polenok, 2009). More than that, the customs and traditions of all peoples have long been preserved and transmitted through ballads, songs, and poems. A song is a common form of communication and education, and teachers in many countries expand the use of songs to teach almost every subject. The use of songs while learning grammar has many advantages over traditional techniques. According to Fuchyla (2007), an analysis of 50 popular English songs showed that 49 of them contain first-person lyrics (I), 88% relate to the person who reflects the listener (You), and only one uses the person's name. Listeners don't know who "I" or "You" are, so anyone can use their imagination and identify with the person in the song or their addressee (Fuchyla, 2007). Students can perform specific linguistic or colloquial tasks based on the situation covered in the song and their life experience. Thus, "I" and "You" can be used as roles or parts for dialogues. Another practical use of songs is that 94% of songs do not specify the time of action, and 80% do not specify the place. Students are allowed to supplement information from the text using their experience or creative ability and to place the song action as desired. It also allows you to perform exercises to learn the rules of English tenses, transferring the operation of a song from the past to the present and the future (Asher, 1982; Graham, 2014).

Discussion

Modern English-Language Songs and Exercises to Them as a Speech Activity Trainer

The use of contemporary songs in English lessons facilitates the rapid formation of first-year students' speaking and thinking activities. Therefore, to improve students' skills, the authors have analyzed and selected modern English-language songs according to educational subjects, have developed a system of exercises for them. The learning activity allows students the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of the language, promote memory development, train listening, supplement vocabulary, and consolidate grammar knowledge.

To conduct the experiment, we have engaged the first-year students of the foreign language faculty of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University, Ukraine. The educational program for the first-year students provides consideration of the following topics: • I, my family, my friends: personal data, individuality, personality formation, autobiography; • Nature and weather: environment, environmental protection, flora, and fauna; • Clothing: fashion, clothing items; • Media: Internet, television and the radio, communication on the Internet, the favorite radio and television programs; • Youth culture: currents of youth culture, youth organizations, clubs of interest; • Science and technological progress: famous scientists and inventors, inventions, modern devices in everyday life; • Work and profession: characteristic of jobs, inclinations, and abilities, choice of business, professional qualities. The grammar that first-year students should revise: • Adverb: neither nor, either or • Clause: Conditionals I, II If I were you, I wish, if only, had better, would be relative clause with whose / who / which / that Do you mind if..., I do not care if... • Conjunction: if, when, as soon as, till, until, etc. + present simple with future reference • Verb: verb + ing, to + verb. But not every song can be selected for English lessons. Most modern English songs contain slang words and turns. It concerns rap, so vocabulary from such songs is not suitable for enriching students' vocabulary. Therefore, when choosing a song, you should pay attention to such directions as pop, jazz, blues, folk, country, musicals. Songs with solo artists are the most suitable for use in English lessons. They do not complicate hearing, and students will be able to repeat the words more easily. Therefore, the following selection criteria are the following: 1. The lyrics must be decent and cheerful, and any obscene language is absent. 2. The song should be in the top 40 of the UK music chart. 3. The tempo of the composition is moderate. Students should be able to catch the tune and speak the words. 4. The song should be consistent with the theme of the lesson.

One of the tasks of our work was to develop a system of exercises for the use of modern songs in English classes for first-year students. The exercise system is a significant factor in ensuring the learning process and success in language acquisition.

Songs in English courses can be used as a 'magic wand' to change the mood or pace of the class. It is advisable to use the exercises in each category for 15-20 minutes. Songs should be tailored to the topic of the course so that first-year students can quickly learn the material and have associations to help them identify a more convenient way to memorize vocabulary or grammatical material. There are many exercises aimed at practicing vocabulary, grammar, or phonetic content derived from a song. We can offer the following:

1. "*Song dictator*" – the teacher dictates to the students the song; after that, the teacher gives words to compare their version with the original text. Unfamiliar words are perfected and repeated by the teacher.

2. "*Fill in the gaps*" – the teacher gives the students a song text in which pictures replace some words. Students' task is to sing a song, uttering all the info.

3. "*Missing words*" – one of the most traditional songs in English classes – the teacher writes on the board one of the couplets of the song and gives the first student to sing it. After that, the teacher erases any word or phrase, and the next student sings a verse. For each successive student, the comments on the board will be less and less. The last student sings a poem with a minimum number of words in each line or no comments. This method works great for learning phrases and sentences.

4. *"Split song"* – this task should be performed in pairs. The teacher prepares two different copies of the selected song in advance. In the first variant, there are odd lines, in the second – even. After listening to the music for the first time, students answer general questions about the content; then, they are divided into pairs and receive the versions of the song in English. During the second audition, students need to fill in the blanks with their understanding of the song. Then the students verify their variants with the original text.

5. *"Spot the mistake"* – the teacher changes the words of the song, deliberately making mistakes in them that need to be corrected by the students. For example, belief – ‘believe’, and so on.

For example, the song *"Beautiful people"* corresponds to the first topic, "I, my family, my friends", both in the curriculum and in the Upstream Pre-Intermediate textbook for the Faculty of Philology of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University. It discusses the subject of individuality, its place in the society, and the formation of personality; there is a useful vocabulary in it. The song is about the "cream" of the community, its showy, insincere, sometimes difficult life. The character of the song states that he feels uncomfortable among them, does not respond, and does not fit into this party because he is who he is, without acting and hypocrisy: "we do not fit in well because we are just ourselves." He does not want to be at a party. His greatest fear is to become so overbearing and pathetic: "This is my only fear: that we become beautiful people," "Let's leave the party. That's not who we are. We are not beautiful". Such text will be an excellent topic for discussion or essay. You can discuss several questions after listening to this song. • What is the song? • How do you understand the meaning of the words "Beautiful people"? • Why does the singer of this song want to be a beautiful person? • How do these people spend their free time?

Unfortunately, the format of our article doesn't allow us to present all the songs which were used in the English classes. We tried to implement in the studying process ten popular songs.

Results

Testing the effectiveness of the exercises system

The experimental investigation involved first-year students of the Foreign Languages Faculty of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University, Ukraine. The first experimental group of 12 students used the system of exercises for three months, while the second, also 12 participants, continued their formal study of English. The implementation of the exercises system took place during the educational process.

Before the experiment, we interviewed students of both groups and teachers.

Questions for the survey:

For students:

1. How often do you use modern songs in English classes?
2. What types of work do you use more often (translation/discussion)?
3. Name some of your favorite English songs.

For teachers:

1. How important do you consider implementing modern English-language songs to teach first-year students?
2. If you use songs in your English classes, what activities do you find the most effective?

Our task was to determine whether the teachers consider implementing modern songs in English classes a vital part of language teaching, or whether they use songs in the learning process; whether students work with songs during the lessons, what music is interesting to them, etc.

A survey of the teachers showed that they found it necessary to use modern songs in English classes. According to the teachers, such activities would have a positive impact on the effectiveness of language learning. A survey of the first-year students found that they did not use modern songs in their English classes, sometimes singing authentic songs learned in school. The first-year students shared their musical preferences; some of them were interested in translating lyrics.

Survey for the first-year students of the experimental group:

1. Are you interested in attending English classes? - Yes - No - Not very much.
2. Do you like the material you study? - Yes - No - Not very much.
3. Do you feel bored in your English class? - Yes - No – Sometimes.
4. Would you like to change the learning material to a more modern one? - Yes – No.
5. Do you feel that your knowledge is getting better in English classes? - Yes – No.

Having analyzed the initial results, we found that the first-year students of both groups are almost the same. About half of those surveyed are not motivated to attend English classes; they would like to study in more up-to-date materials because they do not overlook much success in learning English. After a fruitful work with modern English songs in the experimental group, the teachers conducted thematic tests in both groups. The experimental group showed much more knowledge, and the students did a better job of writing. Moreover, auditioning during the control test made it much easier to show the results and their estimates. More than that, we conducted a re-survey, which proved utterly different results. The first-year students, with whom we actively used the system of exercises developed during three months, changed their minds about English classes. Almost 100% of students said they were happy to attend English classes, to study with interest, better understand the language and significantly increase its level, in contrast, the first-year students, who were taught by a standard method, did not change their answers. After completing the experiment, we spoke to English teachers who gladly informed us that such a system of exercises works. They are curious to complete the task and show good results. This result is justified. The results of the experimental study indicate the feasibility of implementing this system of exercises in the educational process.

Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the questionnaire.

Table 1. *Initial polling as of 09/09/2019*

Students in the English classes:	Experimental group	Non-experimental group
interested	50 %	45 %
like the material	72 %	60 %
bored	48 %	58 %
would like up-to-date material	97 %	90 %
have the result after classes	35 %	30 %

Thus, interviewing and communicating with teachers showed that modern English songs are not widely used in English classes; students aren't interested in attending classes and do not get the desired high results.

Table 2. *Re-polling as of 12/09/2019*

Students in the English classes:	Experimental group	Non-experimental group
interested	88 %	47 %
like the material	90 %	60 %
bored	10 %	60 %
would like up-to-date material	100 %	98 %
have the result after classes	75 %	30 %

In the long run, modern songs in English classes can be useful and structured, using a course of practices that can be applied. It should be noted that such a system of exercises does not take up much time. It is developed for 15-20 minutes, which is a convenient way to improve the types of speech activity. According to the results of the analysis of the experimental study, the following conclusions can be made:

1. As a result of the exercises system implementation in speaking through the use of modern songs in English classes, the teachers noticed a significant increase in language proficiency. We also saw a rise in the general interest in learning a foreign language, especially singing and discussing.

2. Our system of exercises contributes to the full practicing of all kinds of language activities, which is the primary purpose of learning a foreign word. By knowing all aspects of the language, students will soon be able to overcome the communication barrier, apply their acquired knowledge directly to practice – both in everyday communication and in future professional activities.

Conclusion

Advantages of Using Modern Songs in Learning English

The analysis of the psychological and pedagogical features of the first-year students made it possible to conclude that this is an aging period of sharp contradictions in the structure of the personality; it requires a particular pedagogical and methodical skill from the teacher. The analysis and synthesis of methodological literature, and our results, showed that the use of modern songs in English classes is an effective method for training all kinds of speech activity, and students can immerse themselves in the culture. So, when learning English and using modern English songs, students are more likely to overcome the communication barrier, become more motivated to master the language. It also helps to increase the productivity of the educational process.

Prospects for further work on the problem are seen in developing a set of tasks for optional classes using modern English songs and the development of an advanced English song vocabulary.

About the Authors

Svitlana Shekhavtsova, Doctor of Science (Education), Professor of Department of Romance and Germanic Philology at Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University, Ukraine. Her main areas of interest include the Formation of Students' Sociocultural Competence and Subjectness.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8196-8977>.

Olena Byndas, Ph.D., Candidate of Science (Education), Associate Professor of Department of Romance, and Germanic Philology at Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University, Ukraine. Her main areas of interest include Cross-cultural Communication, Sociolinguistics.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4213-5563>.

Viktoriiia Dmytrenko, Doctor of Philology, Professor of Department of Ukrainian and World Literature at Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University, Ukraine. Her main areas of interest include Comparative Literary Studies, Innovative Teaching Methods, Artwork's Poetics.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8364-014X>.

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