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POP SONGS TO ENHANCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AN EFL SETTING

by

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***Abstract:** Many secondary students feel that English is difficult to learn but, in their real life, they like to sing English songs. The contradictive facts can be seen as an inspiration to teach English in an interesting way. Songs have been acknowledged to be interesting media of teaching a foreign language because almost everyone likes songs. They are also good materials for students to learn the real use of a language. A common practice of using songs in an English classroom is for listening comprehension exercise in middle, high school, and college level or for teaching vocabulary to young learners. This paper, however, explores more in a song— to teach grammar, writing, speaking, poetic aspects, as well as pronunciation. Further, depending on the message, songs can also touch feelings, for instance, awakening young people's care and sensitivity toward others.*

***Key words:** pop song, enhance, English language learning, secondary education*

Introduction

It is interesting that there is a kind of two-side fact about teaching and learning English in a non English speaking country like Indonesia. On one side, English may look like a frightening monster or at least something challenging for the students to learn but on the other side, they like to sing or enjoy popular English songs sung by world-class singers such as Celine Dion, Mariah Carrey, or Josh Groban. To mention more up-to-date singers are those such as Addelle, Ketty Perry, or Bruno Mars. Teenagers often say that learning English is hard but they like to sing Dion's "My Heart Will Go On," Carrey's "Hero," Groban's "You Raise Me Up," or Adelle's "Someone Like You." This fact can be viewed as a good opportunity for teachers of English to make use of pop songs to teach English at any level of education including high school.

As a form of art, song is probably the most widely liked. Almost everyone likes to sing, whether aloud or just humming, or at least listen to songs. As a part of music, embracing the melody, lyrics, the sound and rhythm, song is universal, going beyond boundaries. A well composed one can be accepted by

anyone throughout the world, no matter what skin color they have and whatever native language they speak. Someone who does not even speak English may sing a line or two or the refrain of a popular English song like ABBA's "I Have a Dream" or The Queen's "We Are the Champion" without feeling afraid.

As advertisements, public notices, or recipes, song is an authentic piece of language use that can serve a good material for students to learn the real use of a language. With some creativity, songs can be used to teach language skills and components to students.

Typical characteristics of teenagers

Adolescence is a time when teenagers begin to explore and proclaim their personal identities (Anderson and Media). In line with this, a website for teacher and parents entitled "Teen Growth & Development, Years 15 to 17" mentions that in their intellectual growth, teenagers ask "Who am I?" and "What should I be?"

Further, it is explained that to answer the questions, they start to listen to new music, try the latest fashion, and begin to explore social causes. It is quite common, therefore, if teenagers idolize

someone or something that is in trend or being popular either in sport or art or both. While they are in the phase of asserting their personal identity, at the same time, as Anderson and Media also mention, they are self-centered and focused on their own needs without considering the effects on others. Just an example, it is often reported on television that people complain about wild motor race on streets at midnight by teenagers.

The implication in the ELT

Researches on motivation convincingly favor intrinsic motivation in the success of language learning (Brown, 2001). Teachers, therefore, need to stimulate the students' intrinsic motivation.

To motivate learners, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) as quoted by Brown (2001) proposed a set of "ten commandments" three of which are creating a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, developing a good relationship with the learners, and making the language classes interesting. Bringing a song into the language classroom as the main teaching material meet the three requirements as it certainly creates a relaxed atmosphere that eliminates anxiety in language learning, develops a more friendly relationship between the teacher and students, and also makes the learning activities interesting.

One of the characteristics of student centered learning is involving their interest in designing the learning activities (Paul, 2003). Therefore, in selecting a song to be used as the material of teaching and learning English, it is important for the teacher to find out the students' interests such as what kind of songs and which singers they like. Considering the characteristics of teenagers above, it is wise if the teacher chooses a popular song rather than a classical or a jazz one for example, as only certain groups of people can enjoy the last two genres of music.

Some considerations in choosing songs

There are things to consider when choosing a popular song for teenagers. Some of them are as follows.

- It is widely liked especially by teenagers.
- The contents are preferably carrying positive values such as peace, encouragement, care, respect, or love in a broad sense.
- The language should be suitable for the students' proficiency level
- It should meet the objective of teaching, for instance, to teach a certain grammar item, or to teach certain expressions for speaking, etc.
- It does not drive young people to negative conducts such as to be rebellious, emotional, violent, or such things.
- The words in the lyrics are clear.
- The teacher also likes the song.

Further, having some alternatives of songs is better in order to be able to select one that is really suitable for the decided objective of teaching or the other way around, choosing one song which is rich in aspects to teach.

Suggested techniques to use songs in teaching English

There are two basic ways to present songs to teach English. We can decide what language points to teach first then find a suitable song that meet our goals or the other way around. We can decide the song first, then explore what we can do with it maximally. However, whatever way we use, a good preparation is needed.

In this paper, the writer applies the second one, that is deciding the song first. As it is for high school students, the writer chose one that was suitable for their age. The song is entitled "Heal the World" by the late King of Pop Michael Jackson.

This song was selected for the following reasons. "Heal the World" is one of his hits which is very beautiful in the melody and arrangement. The moral message it carries is so touching that everyone loves it until now. The singer, who is also the composer, is very well-known. People still admire and love his songs even after his shocking death in 2009. Teenagers adore him not only for his beautiful songs but also for his typical dance movement called "moon walk."

After studying the lyrics (See the appendix) the writer found out that the song was rich in language points that can be taught to students. The song can be used to teach grammar, writing, speaking, poetic expressions, pronunciation, and social awareness. Since there are many aspects to teach, the techniques are presented in each language point. As each session is limited by the time allotment, the following aspects can be spread into more than one meeting.

Grammar

Having grammar activities is generally not very interesting. However, if it starts audio visually by playing "Heal the World" with the text shown it will be different and the students will be very happy. They will not only listen to the song but also sing along together with the recording.

There are many grammar points in the song that can be discussed as a review or refreshing to check the students' previous knowledge and understanding. The most frequently appearing grammar item in the song lyrics is **Conditional Sentence**.

First, the teacher can pick the first conditional sentence in the song, which is in the first stanza, as the example.

*And if you really try
You'll find there's no need to cry
In this place you'll feel
There's no hurt or sorrow.*

To present the real use of conditional

sentence in its full meaning, the full context should be shown, not only picking the first two lines. It is also important to inform the students that in the real use, the 'if clause' is not always followed by modal auxiliary 'will.' It can be followed by a Simple Present Tense.

The teacher can also emphasize that the 'if clause' is the condition that causes the other situation to happen. After the first example has been given and discussed, next, the students are encouraged to find the other conditional sentences in the song. They will try to look for them and find them one by one until all are mentioned. The following are the other conditional sentences found in the song:

*If you care enough for the living
Make a little space, to make a better place
(Appears twice, in stanzas 2 and 7)*

*If you care enough for the living
Make a better place for you and for me
(Found in the refrain, repeated 5 times)*

*If you want to know why
There's a love that cannot lie
Love is strong it only cares for joyful giving
(Appears once, in stanza 3)*

*If we try we shall see
In this bliss we cannot feel
fear or dread we stop existing and start living
(Appears once, in stanza 3)*

*We could really get there
if you cared enough for the living
(Appears once in stanza 2).*

As has been informed previously, there are conditional sentences without "will" or the so called Zero Conditional in the song. The pattern is *if/when + Present Simple followed by another Present Simple*. Zero Conditional is used to describe rules and situations that are always true, where one event follows the other such as "If you put milk in the fridge, it lasts longer" (Maris, 2007). An example from the lyrics is, "*If you care enough for the living, make a little space, to make a better place.*" In this case, if

people pay attention to others' living then they have got something to do, a responsibility to keep the environment good not only for themselves but also for others to live in.

Another grammar point that frequently appears in the song is **Imperative**. As what has been done, the teacher can mention one example of the imperative sentences found in the song, for example, "Make a little space to make a better place" (stanza 2), then check the students' memory of the form of Imperatives. After that the students can be assigned to find and make a list of the imperatives found in the song. There are eleven imperatives in the song lyrics. Those are as follows:

*Make a little space
to make a better place (2x)*

*So make a better world
Make a better world...*

*Make a better place
For you and for me (3x)*

*Heal the World
Make it a better place (3x)*

*See the nations turn
Their swords into plowshares*

Save it for our children...

If we go further, we will see that there are many verb-ing along the song, either as gerund or present participle. Therefore, the students' knowledge about **the use of verb-ing** can be refreshed.

First, the teacher can ask the students to mention all the verb-ing found in the song. After that the teacher can ask the students to identify each verb-ing whether it is a gerund or present participle. The students should also explain why each is which. For example verb-ing in "There are people **dying**" is a present participle because "dying" here refers to an ongoing condition whereas verb-ing in "if you care enough for the living" is a gerund because the word

"living" functions as a noun which comes after a preposition in the sentence.

By doing such an activity, comprising identification and simple analysis, the students are applying their grammar knowledge. All the verb-ing in the song are as follows.

1. *Love is strong, it only cares for joyful **giving**.* (as gerund, after preposition)

2. *Fear or dread we stop **existing*** (as gerund, after the verb 'stop')

3. *and start **living**.* (as gerund after the verb 'start')

4. *Love's enough for us **growing**.* (as gerund, after preposition)

5. *Then why do we keep **strangling** life.* (as gerund, after the verb 'keep')

The lines "There are people **dying** if you care enough for the living" appear at least five times in the song with the following analysis:

*There are people **dying*** (present participle)
if you care enough for the living (gerund)

Writing

The lines in the song can also be used for a writing activity because generally the language used in songs is like that of poems—poetic, and sometimes figurative. Some songs do not use figurative language but, in order to understand it well, we need to go beyond the words that are used.

Therefore, to check the students' understanding of the content of a song and, at the same time, to assess their writing skill, the students can be assigned to rewrite the song in their own words based on their understanding. They can rewrite the song in an essay of one or two paragraphs, not in verses or stanzas. The teacher can afterward check the writing products using a certain rubric for evaluating writing that covers student's comprehension and the language use.

The comprehension shows how well each student understands the content of the song whereas the language use, which performs each student's language competence, covers grammar, diction, mechanics, and punctuation as well.

Speaking

Besides for grammar and writing activities, the song can also be used for a speaking activity. Some possible activities are retelling the content of the song, giving opinions on the social issue, telling what one can do to avoid wars and create peace.

The predominant grammatical item found in the lyrics, in this case conditional sentence, can also be applied in speaking. The teacher can for instance ask each student to make one conditional sentence.

The last activity can also be developed into a more interactive game in which the conditional sentence spoken by student 1 must be continued by student 2 then student 3 has to make another sentence based on student 2's sentence, and so on. The following is the example.

S1: If you are hungry, you can cook in the kitchen.

S2: If you cook in the kitchen, close the front door.

S3: If you close the front door,

S4: If ..., Etc.

This game is the integration of grammar in speaking. It will not only internalize the sentence pattern but also make the students think actively, creatively, and excitingly. Such a mental-engaging activity is the main characteristic of student-centered learning (Paul, 2003).

Getting to know poetic language

Song lyrics are usually poetic. Certain expressions in the song that are not commonly used in every day language can be introduced to students. In the selected song above, the title "*Heal the World*" is a personification, a form of figurative language. The word 'heal' is used to personify the world that is 'sick' caused by wars and /or other destroying actions.

From the example, the teacher can give other examples of personifications such as "*talk to the wind,*" '*the crying tree,*' or '*The weather is friendly.*'

Afterwards, the students can be encouraged to make their own personification by giving some human characteristics to things (Knickerbocker & Reninger, 1960). They might surprise the teacher and even themselves with their creativities in producing various personifications that can be used to write a poem later. This is a good beginning of learning literature.

Meanwhile, the repeated line "*Make a little space to make a better place*" is an imagery which is appealing not to be selfish using too much natural resources for one's own sake without leaving anything for other people or future generations.

Another example of the use of imagery is in the line "*See the nations turn their swords into plowshares.*" The words '*swords*' and '*plowshares*' are concrete ones that can be imagined easily. They are used by the composer to make listeners imagine easily a situation that is changing from hatred into peace or love.

Besides personification and imagery, the rhymes in the song are also interesting to present. Let us look at the first and second stanza of the song.

*There's a place in your heart
And I know that it is love
And this place could be much brighter
than tomorrow
And if you really try
You'll find there's no need to cry
In this place you'll feel
There's no hurt or sorrow*

*There are ways to get there
If you care enough for the living
Make a little space
to make a better place*

Although the words 'heart' and 'love' at the ends of the first and second lines do not exactly sound the same, there is a similarity in the sound of the vowels. Then we find that '*tomorrow*' in line 3 rhymes with '*sorrow*' in line 7 while '*try*' in line 4 rhymes with '*cry*' in 5. Other examples of rhymes are found in the refrain of the song.

Heal the World
*Make it a better **place***
*for you and for me and the entire human **race**.*
*There are people **dying***
*If you care enough for the **living***
Make a better place for you and for me.

The word 'place' rhymes with 'race', meanwhile, the word 'dying' has the same ending sound with 'living.' At this stage, students will realize that rhymes are contributive in creating beauty in verses besides personification, so they can practice it when they write a poem.

Pronunciation

It goes without saying that people in general including language learners subconsciously learn pronunciation from songs as usually songs are sung by the native speaker of the language. As the exposure is an authentic use of a language sung by a native speaker, people will imitate relatively the same pronunciation, and thus, they will pronounce the words in the song correctly.

In Krashen's opinion (in Gass, S.M. and Selinker, L., 1994), besides a comprehensible input, an appropriate affect is needed for the success of language learning. As has been elaborated previously, the use of a pop song in learning English will be motivating the students and eliminating their anxiety. It means the affective filter is low and thus, the acquisition takes place.

Social awareness

The goal of Indonesian national education as stated in the Government Decree of the Republic of Indonesia No.19 of the year 2005 as cited in Badan Standard Pendidikan Nasional (2007) is to make Indonesian citizens to be the ones that are God fearing, having high morals, intelligent, productive, and having high competitiveness in the national as well as international interactions. High morals cover sensitivity, care, and concern toward others. On relevance to this value, education should also cover character

building one of which is a form of social awareness—care for others.

While giving advices to young people can sometimes be in vain, a song can be the media that functions better. A popular song speaks louder than advices because it is frequently heard by the society as an entertainment and the lyrics stay in people's memory. People even often say them when singing the song. Therefore, it can influence people's behavior. For example, the lyrics in "Edelweiss" arouse patriotism so that people who often sing the song will love their land country more.

Another example, the words in The Queen's "We Are the Champions" can motivate athletes to win a sport championship so that they work very hard during the game and as a result win it.

"Heal the World" was a bit surprising because, if looking at all his glamour and fame, people did not expect that a megastar like Michael Jackson paid a great attention to children's lives in some countries who were suffering from the effects of wars.

Teenagers who live in peaceful countries might not be aware that in some other parts of the world many children are starving, losing their parents, becoming disabled, and not able to get education because of wars. By listening to the song, understanding the meaning as well as the message, and singing the song, it is expected that teenagers will be more sensitive toward others.

Conclusion

In an attempt to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation in learning English, it is essential that an English class learning activities be pleasant, relaxed, and interesting. For students of secondary education, popular songs can be a good alternative. If explored well, a popular song can serve to enhance teenagers' English language learning not only in listening comprehension and vocabulary enrichment but also in grammar, writing, speaking,

pronunciation, and learning literature as well. More than that, a popular song can be used to touch feelings, such as awakening students' sensitivity and care towards others.

Appendix:

Heal the World (Michael Jackson)

Little girl talking:

*(I think about the generations
and they say they want to make it
a better place for our children and our children's
children
so that they, they, they know it's a better world for
them
and I think they can make it a better place)*

There's a place in your heart
And I know that it is love
And this place could be much brighter than
tomorrow
And if you really try
You'll find there's no need to cry
In this place you'll feel
There's no hurt or sorrow

There are ways to get there
If you care enough for the living
Make a little space
to make a better place

REFRAIN:
Heal The World
Make it a better place
For you and for me and the entire human race
There are people dying
If you care enough for the living
Make a better place for you and for me

If you want to know why
There's a love that cannot lie
Love is strong it only cares for joyful giving
If we try we shall see
In this bliss we cannot feel
Fear or dread we stop existing and start living

Then it feels that always
Love's enough for us growing
So make a better world
Make a better world...

(REFRAIN): Heal the world ...

And the dream we were
Conceived in will reveal a joyful face

And the world we
Once believed in will shine again in grace
Then why do we keep strangling life
Wound this earth crucify its soul
Though it's plain to see
This world is heavenly
Be God's glow

We could fly so high
Let our spirits never die
In my heart
I feel you are all my brothers
Create a world with no fear
Together we'll cry happy tears
See the nations turn
Their swords into plowshares

We could really get there
If you cared enough for the living
Make a little space
To make a better place...

(REFRAIN): Heal the world ...

There Are People Dying
If You Care Enough For The Living
Make A Better Place
For You And For Me

There Are People Dying
If You Care Enough For The Living
Make A Better Place
For You And For Me
You and for me
You and for me
.....
Save it for our children...

(Taken from:
<http://www.elyrics.net/read/m/michael-jackson-lyrics/heal-the-world-lyrics.html>

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