

FOLK SONGS DO MAGIC IN TEACHING SPEECH AND GRAMMAR PATTERNS IN EFL CLASS

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*"Music is the art of thinking with sounds."
Jules Combarieu*

ABSTRACT

The authors in searching for new ways and stimuli of teaching vocabulary and grammar to students in EFL class present their own vision of meeting the challenge. In this study it was hypothesized that folk songs significantly stimulate and encourage students to learn more lexis and grammar they encounter in lyrics. In this paper, the authors fairly claim that rhymed speech and grammar patterns help students to learn and reinforce the correct articulation and pronunciation of sounds, accent and rhythm features. Materials and study instruments aiming at the solution of the outlined problem are investigated with regard of the roles that the song genre fulfills. An experiment conducted by the authors with the aim in view to prove that the repeated playback of a song expands students' vocabulary and helps them to better assimilate grammar, was chosen as a leading research method in this study. The research made it possible for the authors to empirically prove that folk songs can do magic in EFL class contributing to the comprehension of the foreign language in the context of culture, transforming a monotonous memorization and reproduction of language material into creative work, solving the problem of multiple repetition of a single model. The findings of the study can serve as a general guideline for university and high school faculty and pre-service teachers.

Key words: creative work, EFL class, folk songs, linguistic material assimilation, multiple repetition, rhymed speech and grammar patterns

1. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that in ancient times, educators gave priority to teaching students to sing, for songs, dedicated to the exploits of heroes, raised ethical qualities, developed rhythm and harmony, and instilled orderliness in thoughts, emotions and activities. Since then, educators have widely used this teaching method. In numerous researches (Kashchuk, 2004; Perkas, 2004; Aleksandrova, 2006; Nekhorosheva, 2006; Komarova, 2008; Goebel, 2009; Savelieva, 2010; Spiess, 2012; Kuimova and Shabalina, 2014; Dashkina, 2015; Golovina and Umanets, 2015; Levchina, 2015; Zabolotneva, 2015; Pomorova, 2016) this issue has been covered.

The relevance of this study can be proved by the fact, that folk songs as language material in learning foreign languages have hardly ever been used by now. Although many tutorials contain original or specially created for educational purposes songs, British and American song folklore is not represented in them. The solution of the mentioned problem required the development of new methodologies and tools. With this aim, the authors conducted an experiment that allowed identifying the role of folk songs as language material in learning foreign languages.

Study materials included 35 British and American folk songs. 72 students of Kazan High school (Russia) volunteered to take part in the experiment, which revealed that the song genre appeals to students' likings and meets their interests. In the course of the experiment there were identified and described the key features of British and American song folklore and specified the teaching methods on the use of folk songs in EFL class. The authors elaborated a series of training and test exercises implemented in the experiment, as well.

It is evident that introducing a new subject to students can be challenging if the students lack both the background knowledge and vocabulary and grammar related to the subject. The repeated playback of a song makes students ponder the meaning of the words, notice the different shades in their meaning, and learn how to express thoughts in a different way. Folk songs expand students' vocabulary and help them better assimilate speech and grammar patterns. This material gives students the chance to practice new vocabulary and grammar in snug musical surroundings.

The authors consider their experiment successfully conducted, although the authors, too, faced up to the challenge of selecting and choosing the proper folk songs.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the fact that folklore can be called a repository of national culture, folklore texts are a stable and rich source of the national language (Aleksandrova, 2006). Authentic songs, to which by all means folk songs belong, are a bright collection of culture symbols, concepts, myths (Levchina, 2015).

According to Spiess (2012) and Pomorova (2016), the importance of the use of songs in foreign language teaching is difficult to overestimate for:

- song material allows students to get acquainted with the universal values and enrich their spiritual world
- songs teach students to see the beauty of nature and human feelings
- song genre vividly reflects various aspects of social life of the people of the country of the target language and cultivates respect to the country of the studied language
- lyrics is the material that children like and care, and, consequently, they get positively charged for learning it.

Kashchuk (2004) considers that language learning through songs produces a good effect. It is both fun and an efficient method of assimilating language material. By singing students develop good pronunciation and auditory memory due to complex factors such as rhyme, harmony, tonality, melody. Multiple repetitions, characteristic of song genre, facilitate easy and involuntary memorization of speech and grammar patterns.

In Dashkina's opinion (2015) learning songs in a foreign language in the mode of cooperation makes the learning process an element of conviviality that has a significant impact on the emotional state of learners.

Savelieva (2010), Kuimova and Shabalin (2014) claim that musical background not only facilitates storing language material in the long-term memory, but also reduces fatigue in the learning process. Songs, the researchers further assert, give an opportunity to diversify the activities the teacher implements in EFL class through the use of different modes: "teacher - student", "teacher - class", etc.

Rhymed lyrics can be used successfully in EFL class for presentation new language phenomena (Perkas, 2004).

Goebel (2009) advocates the idea that music has the potential to realize the educational objectives in EFL class.

The proponents of the theory that songs play a great role in teaching foreign languages Golovina and Umanets (2015) state that rhymed texts are memorized much easier because of the exploitation of such types of human memory as auditory, imaginative and motor.

Zabolotneva (2015) thinks that songs require a special approach to choosing teaching methods. In order to have the song become a part of the learning process, it is necessary to use non-traditional ways of teaching and to make the process of learning communicatively orientated by developing exercises of creative characteristic based on lyrics.

The authors share the viewpoint of Komarova (2008) who highlights the problem of selecting and choosing the proper songs for the educational purposes. In this regard, a compilation of English poems, rhymes and songs by Nekhorosheva (2006) also drew the authors' attention.

Thus, literature review showed that a good number of educators in Russia recognize the importance of the use of music, precisely songs, in EFL class; the role of folk songs in EFL class has not been thoroughly studied in spite of the fact that folk songs constitute one of the brightest and richest genres of folklore which most fully embodied folk traditions and nations' world perception.

3. MATERIALS AND STUDY INSTRUMENTS

3.1. Students' Background

Number, age and gender characteristics: 72 students, 15-16 years old, mixed who made up four groups: 2 control and 2 experimental.

Students' status: High school students.

3.2. Research Site

The experiment took place in Gymnasium # 122.

Gymnasium # 122 is ranked among 100 best schools of Russia. The number of students is 1200. The priority direction of the gymnasium is the formation of the intellectual, moral and creative personality, freely adaptable in modern society.

3.3. Studied materials

The study material included 35 British and American folk songs.

3.4. Goals and research method

The main goal the authors set in this study was to prove that folk songs can significantly increase students' interest in learning speech and grammar patterns in a meaningful way.

One of the targets for the researchers in this study was to elaborate a series of training and test exercises.

An experiment was chosen as a leading research method.

The key features of British and American song folklore that were identified at the preparatory stage of the experiment assisted the authors to specify the teaching methods on the use of folk songs in EFL class.

4. SUMMARY

In accordance with the set objectives in the study, the experiment was conducted with the aim to monitor, analyze and assess the effectiveness of using folk songs in mastering students' grammar and speech patterns in EFL classes.

The experimental training was conducted for students of the 10-th and 11-th grades (2 control groups and 2 experimental groups) during two semesters: Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 in Gymnasium # 122.

72 students took part in the experiment: 2 control groups - 38 students and 2 experimental groups - 34 students.

The experiment consisted of three phases:

1. Ascertaining experiment.
2. Forming experiment.
3. Control experiment.

A series of panel discussion classes were held before the ascertaining stage of the experiment to identify the importance and the role of folk music genre in stimulating students' performance in EFL class. The obtained results of students' responses can be ranked as follows. Students regard folk songs as beneficial due to the items they have mentioned:

- they are authentic, and thus, motivating
- songs repeat a lot of vocabulary and grammar structures; repetition assists recall
- good examples of colloquial English
- do not follow "inauthentic" grammar of many EFL course-books, etc.
- highlight features of pronunciation such as ellipsis and elision
- enable teachers to teach culture and history
- folk music is one of the biggest sources of English outside the classroom; if students enjoy these tasks, they may search out more music independently.

At the ascertaining stage, a questionnaire was offered to the students to reveal their attitude and readiness to master English with the help of folk songs. The questionnaire helped to point out the most popular factors of folk songs inclusion into the learning process that served the base of the following experiment:

Folk songs:

- help to keep in mind complex material, verbal clichés, colloquial expressions
- impact positively on the character and mood
- form the aesthetic taste
- are one of the strongest incentives for the further study of a foreign language.

A lexical and grammatical test was offered to students to reveal their current knowledge on such topics as Conditionals, Modals, Tense forms, Gerund, Infinitive, Set expressions, Idioms.

The results of the test in the control groups are shown in Fig. 1.

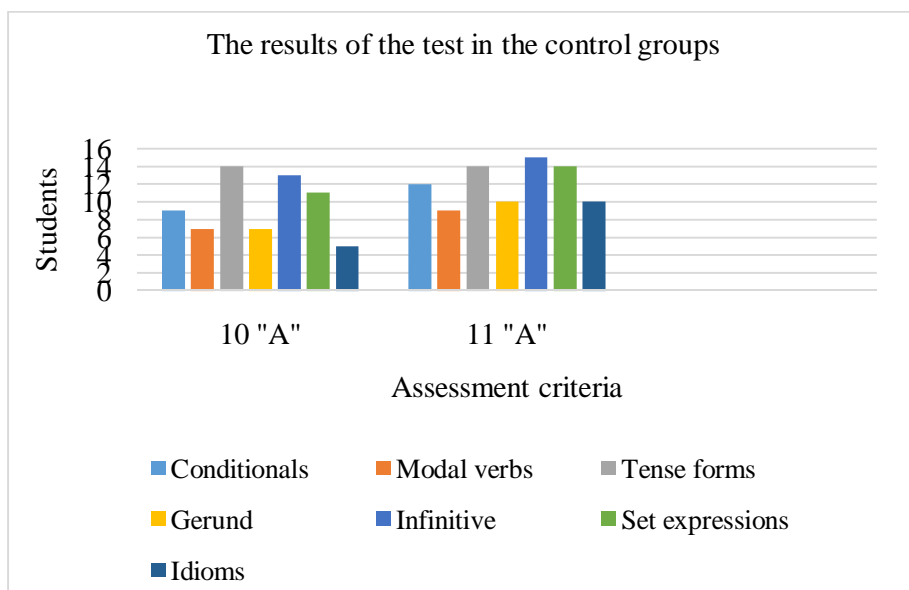


Fig. 1. Results of the test in the control groups

The results of the test in the experimental groups are shown in Fig. 2.

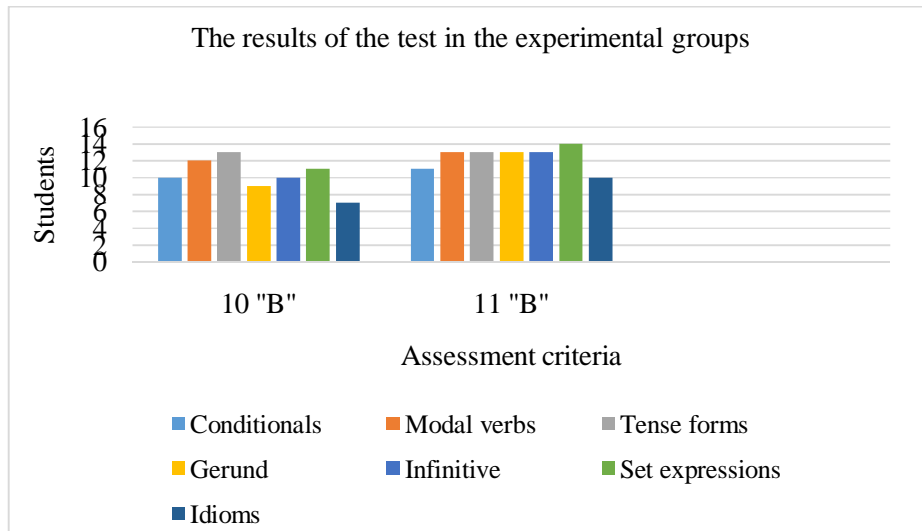


Fig. 2. Results of the test in the experimental groups

The overall results show the correct answers given by the students of control and experimental groups.

As can be seen from the diagrams, it proves that less than half of the students are unaware of their level of knowledge in English, mostly in proper usage of grammar and lexical material.

A further investigation of the problem was carried on at the formative stage of the experiment where different folk songs and guided drill, gap fill, creative exercises have been implemented to boost consolidation of speech and grammar patterns in EFL classes during an academic year. The following tasks were used by the students in working with folk song material:

Cloze Activities

Folk music can also be used to isolate particular grammar structures or vocabulary. Students' attention was drawn to these in the form of a cloze activity. Words can be deleted to practice a target grammar point, such as past tense verbs, prepositions, or compound nouns, or to identify key words.

Lyrical strips

Lyrics was cut into strips and put into order as students hear the song. Following this, students check their answers by listening to the song again and mumbling or miming along to the song.

Dictation

With short songs, students can write down all the words that they hear. They can then try to piece together the lyrics of the song with a partner. Afterwards, the teacher hands out the lyrics sheet for them to check.

Story Telling

With folk songs that tell a story (and let's face it, that's most of them), students can either retell the story to a partner, covering reported speech and supporting conversational abilities or write a written response. For example, many folk songs contain different stories. Students could write a response letter refuting the allegations, etc.

Finding collocations and expressions

A collocation to describe someone's physical appearance: [brown-eyed].

Isolation

This can be used to isolate a piece of lexis. However, it can also be used to isolate a grammar structure or a pronunciation feature that you want to teach. Students simply stand up from their seats when they hear this piece of language in the song.

The control experiment was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of using folk songs as a teaching method to encourage and motivate students to acquire speech and grammar patterns in EFL class. The control battery of tests was used to monitor and analyze the effectiveness of the used folk songs in improving students' knowledge in English.

The results of the control groups are shown in Fig. 3.

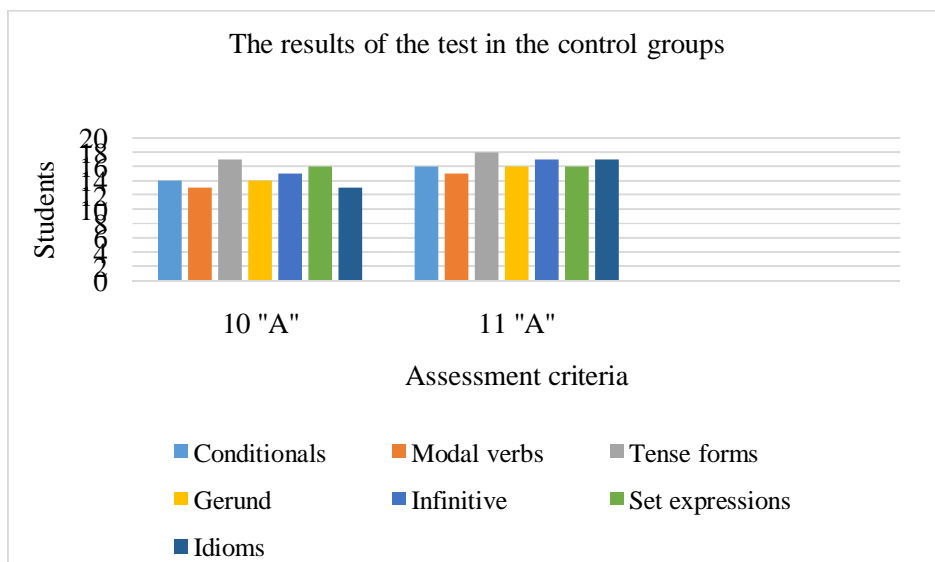


Fig. 3. Results of the test in the control groups

The results of the test in the experimental groups are shown in Fig. 4.

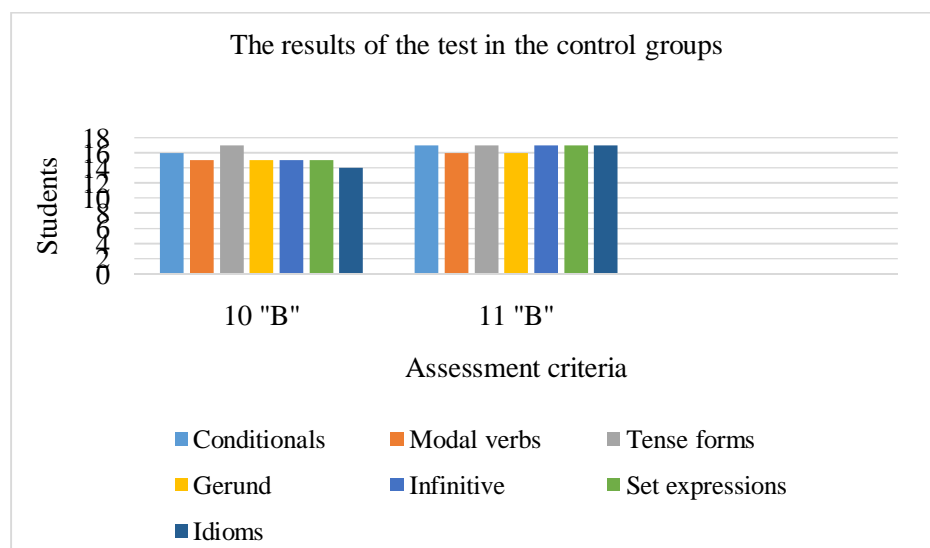


Fig. 4. Results of the test in the control groups

Comparing the results of both grades we obtained discrepant results. Overall, they confirmed the positive trend in the change of students' knowledge of English via folk song usage. Significantly, the quality of knowledge of students in the English language increased that, to some respect, can prove the formation of educational abilities and skills.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, it was shown that classroom teachers in EFL class have got a unique opportunity to be an 'event-maker': an event which students want to be part of. The authors draw attention to the fact that the potential of folk songs available to the teacher can lead to ideas which are fresh, relevant and efficient. The approbation of the materials, thoroughly selected by the researchers for this study, proved itself positively and allowed the authors to come to the conclusion that:

- cooperation of creativity and folk songs in EFL class can foster the acquisition of speech and grammar patterns

- the subject area for students sound attractive and meaningful
 - folk songs can do magic in EFL provided regular activities.
- The findings of the research can serve as general recommendations for high school faculty and can be effectively used in EFL class.

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