

# Using Music to Enhance Language Teaching

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## Introduction

Pop music is an invaluable tool for learning a language, both inside and outside the classroom, and the session I gave at the conference examined the benefits of using this method, illustrated with practical examples.

I chose [Hello Goodbye by the Beatles](#) as the opening song, as it is instantly familiar to most people, and is ideal for exploiting antonyms. Participants were asked to identify the opposites used in the song and to recognise these while listening (and singing along!)

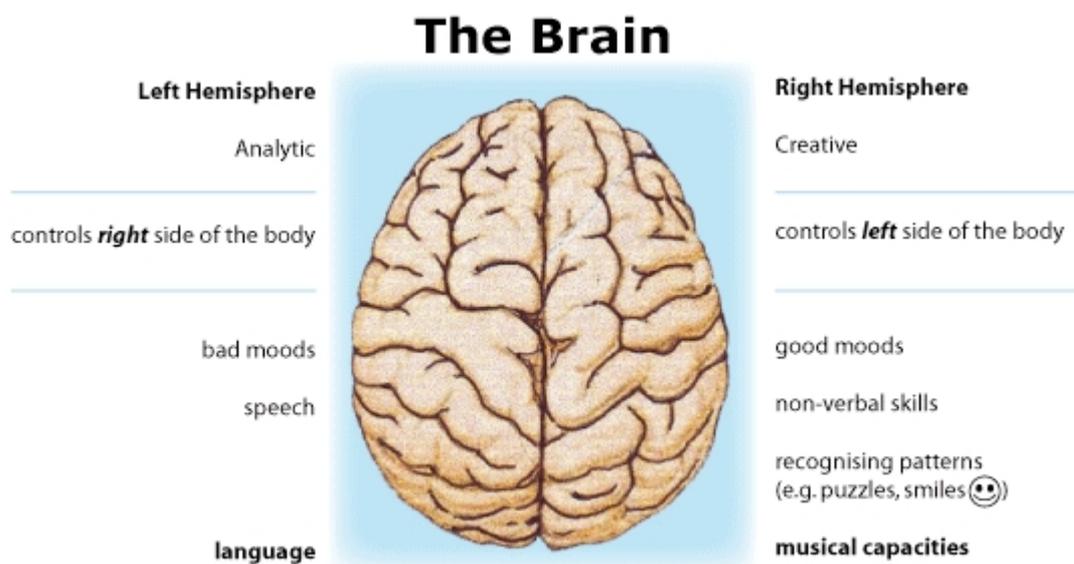
## Meaningful, Motivating and Memorable

Songs are *Meaningful*, *Motivating* and *Memorable*. These three M's are essential in language teaching – students need to be constantly stimulated and encouraged. Songs are *meaningful* to students, and they can relate to them on a personal and emotional level. Because they are interested in (often obsessed by!) this medium, they find this kind of learning highly *motivating*. Songs are, of course, very *memorable* – we have all experienced how songs “stick” in the mind – and by giving students cause to think about the language structures and vocabulary used, songs become an extremely effective learning tool. Subsequent hearings of the song outside the classroom can subconsciously consolidate the language, reminding the listener of relevant teaching points, regardless of time and place. Students are also reminded that English is not confined to the classroom and that the language they are learning is real – all of the above reasons give them clear learning goals.

## Songs Create a Positive Learning Environment

Where possible, students should be asked to sing the song, not only to help improve pronunciation, but also to lift their spirits. By singing as part of a group, students are less conscious of making mistakes and are focusing on a specific

task rather than the language used. Apart from the emotional pleasure gained from singing, the increased intake of oxygen cannot but put them in a good mood! I demonstrated this with two ‘feel-good’ songs – [I’m a Believer by The Monkees](#) and [Lemon Tree by Fool’s Garden](#). The accompanying activities which were taken, like many of the songs in the session, from the Italian publication *Team Up in English* (Kavanagh, Moore, Morris, new ed. 2011, ELI) are very simple, with students forming the past simple (in the former) and present continuous (in the latter) forms of a selection of verbs and listening for them in the songs. By using upbeat songs, to which participants sang along, there was an extremely positive atmosphere in the room.



### Involving ‘Left and Right’ Brains

When we study language we are using the brain’s left hemisphere, but music and repetition stimulate the right hemisphere - the use of songs involves both hemispheres in the learning process, thereby greatly increasing students’ potential. I demonstrated this with some grammar activities, eliciting the *used to* structure and Question forms – I then played [Gloria Gaynor’s I Will Survive](#) (“I used to cry, now I hold my head up high”) and [Elvis Presley’s Are You Lonesome Tonight?](#) The brain’s left hemisphere was responsible for completing the activity, while the right hemisphere consolidated the language through music.

### Improving Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation

Songs help make the learning of new words and structures more natural and memorable. By singing along, students are naturally acquiring real vocabulary

and correct pronunciation. English, as a stress-timed language, is very rhythmic, and rhythm greatly aids memorisation, even for single words. Songs can also be used to highlight social issues and promote discussion - I demonstrated this by playing Jack Johnson's *The 3 R's*, a song about the importance of recycling, taken from the website [www.tuneintoenglish.com](http://www.tuneintoenglish.com) (Kavanagh, 2008).

### **Flexible, Authentic and Easily Available**

Not only can more than one activity type be used with any song, but they can also be adapted to any level and are 'real'. Tim Murphey (1992) demonstrated that anything you can do with a text you can do with a song - the task should, of course, be graded to the students' level. Songs are also very easy to find – if the teacher doesn't have a copy, the students will almost certainly have one. This goes back to the three M's, where the use of students' favourite songs, rather than the teacher's, is far more meaningful, motivating and memorable.

To finish the session I chose [Blame It on the Boogie](#) by The Jacksons. Volunteers mimed the sunshine, moonlight, good times and boogie, and then listened to decide who to blame it on! By singing and dancing along, we closed the session with a smile on our faces and many ideas for enlivening our language classroom.

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