Within this article I have tried to describe a framework for using songs in the English classroom. This isn’t the only way to develop our students listening or to structure a listening/speaking lesson, but it is a way that we have found to be effective and motivating for students.

Listening and speaking are two of the most challenging skills for students to develop and yet also two of the most important. By developing their ability to listen well we develop our students’ ability to become more independent learners, as by hearing accurately they are much more likely to be able to reproduce accurately, review their understanding of grammar and develop their own vocabulary. By doing so the students will become more self-reliant and will not fear exposing themselves before others.

Songs allow the teacher to bring the voices of native speakers into the classroom, and also allow teachers to present a variety of voices and accents to their students. Songs is always a useful tool in teaching a foreign language, as it is a written text with oral patterns involving richness and diversity of topics related to students’ daily lives.

**Keywords:** songs, listening, teaching, foreign language.

Learning a foreign language is not always easy or appealing. It is then the teacher’s job to work it that way. The question is how. Communication implies an audience, and in the classroom it also implies teacher talk, that is to say, the language typically used by teachers in the foreign language classroom. As Lynch puts it, “one of the challenges of language teaching in the unnatural’ classroom setting is to devise or adapt communication tasks in such a way as to require negotiation of meaning [5].

**Kobylianska I.**

**USING SONGS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO STUDENTS**

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Teaching is then viewed as a collaborative enterprise, which makes demands on all partners involved in the process. Furthermore, “Language is particularly good in social roles, at maintaining social ties and influencing others [3]”.

Learning is also a social act: “When children learn the meaning of a word, they are learning something about the thoughts of other people” [7].

So, the best way to learn vocabulary through context is by hearing it used in a conversation with another person, so that we can check its meaning. Again, as Bloom points out, “Words are important because they are the building blocks of language, and language allows us to express our thoughts and understand those of others – to become full-fledged members of the human community [1]”.

To get hold of those “building blocks”, students need to be attentive. Attention and memory are crucial in L2 acquisition. Children’s learning mechanisms happen outside awareness, while adults can use their analytical abilities. However, Abrunhosa quoted Skehan and Dekeyser to show that aptitude and age are also significant predictors of proficiency in naturalistic learning contexts. The author concludes that adults learn mostly in an explicit way, while children learn mostly in an implicit one.

What teachers need to do is to trigger interest in students and keep that interest alive, which is also connected with the usefulness of learning. To make students engaged in the learning process, interest and motivation are not enough, learning must also be made useful, it has to carry on some meaning for students [2].

As we can see, in order to be effective, learning has to mean something to students, otherwise, they will refuse that knowledge.

Students take in and understand information in different ways, that is to say, they have different learning styles. Some like to visualize, while others prefer to hear. Some like to perform tasks individually, while others enjoy interaction with their peers. Riazi explains this point very well when he asserts: “If teachers are aware of where their learners are coming from, how they approach language learning, what they feel about their language learning experiences, and how they like to learn the language, they will be able to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom” [8].

Students need to have a positive attitude, that is to say, an affective attitude towards learning. Songs are a good way to practice and develop the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The importance of students’ attitude towards language learning is that it can spark off positive attitudes to “compensate for students’ dislike towards the particular learning task and drove them to perform better [10]. In addition to motivating students by making the course enjoyable and appropriate for their needs, a motivated partner is also able to enhance learners’ performance.”

We must not forget that there are two types of motivation – the internal one, which is related to the willingness to learn and the external one, which is related to the reward or approval by family or school. And there is a third kind of motivation, the instrumental one, that is to say, pragmatic, or, in other words, related to the need one has to learn a language for professional reasons.

Now, music, and especially songs, can be an amazing tool for teaching languages, because songs will bounce around in a student’s head long after the lesson is over. Learners pick up vocabulary, grammatical structures, and the rhythm of the language simply by doing what they enjoy doing – humming and singing. Furthermore,
songs can set a mood. Songs can also be used to signal a transition from one activity to another. All in all, songs can be a bounding experience for everybody. Songs can make the lessons lively and interesting. The emphasis is on effective communication rather than on mastery of the language.

The absence of pressure to achieve immediate academic perfection, as well as freedom from the sensation of being constantly assessed will liberate students’ natural desire to acquire a new skill [9].

Music, and especially songs, contribute directly to the development of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences, which, according to the Council of Europe, are the components of an effective communicative competence.

“Communicative competence in this narrower sense has the following components:
– linguistic competences;
– sociolinguistic competences;
– pragmatic competences.”

A song is also an authentic document of strong playful characteristics, which is highly motivating in language learning [11]. Besides all that, the simple interpretation of a song involves intonation, too.

Songs can also motivate students to communicate in the target language. If we look back, we can see that music has always played an important role in teaching. Music, especially through chants, rhymes and songs, has always been connected with learning since immemorial times, going through the methods of teaching in the 20th century. This method emphasizes the use of music as a way to activate language acquisition. Generally speaking, and according to Lozanov, the mentor of this method, the artistic expressions, such as music, are related to the right hemisphere of the brain, which can activate the left hemisphere, responsible for oral language processing and pragmatic activities. According to Lozanov’s theories, quoted by Hansen: “The whole brain is always working, right and left hemispheres, neocortex and subcortic areas. When we polarise our messages towards the intellectual centres of the brain only, the others will not close down but engage in competing activities.

Activities with songs are usually student centred, so, when we use them, students are given a chance to express and enjoy themselves, as well as storing information in their minds. Now, all these resources require the activation of both left and right hemispheres of our brain. Thus, students will use their long-term memory and learn effectively. Songs will bring the structural, pragmatic, prosodic and communicative aspects of language together, in language classrooms.

The use of songs in the language classroom softens students’ consciousness of effort, in a way that enables a relaxing atmosphere and, as a consequence, the unconscious learning and acquisition of linguistic structures, as well as vocabulary. Learning the first letters in old times was through the memorization of short sentences or the reading of short texts, usually accompanied by the lyre or the zither. In Medieval times, students learnt how to read, in religious schools, through short rhythmic recitations and liturgical texts. During the age of Discoveries, missionaries, more precisely the Jesuits, taught Portuguese through songs, adapting local melodies as an affective factor and relating learning to cultural rites [11].

On the whole, songs can be highly motivating, because they are part of
Everyone's life experiences; they can also be a way to the recognition, identification and discrimination of sounds, as well as rhythm and pronunciation. Songs can be an aid in teaching differences in the values and beliefs of different cultural groups [2].

Besides being a way of improving students' communication ability, to enhance appreciation of other cultures, songs may also raise social awareness of the world, reduce prejudice towards different ways of thinking and acting, promote mutual understanding, and teach students how to cope with or solve difficult problems, by using the foreign language [11].

Another advantage of songs is that students are exposed to a great variety of registers. Songs are also authentic, as opposed to the frequent contrived, stilted language in most texts teachers use in the classroom.

The repetitive style of most songs can also help to promote automatization of colloquial language [3].

Songs provide conversational language with lots of repetition of vocabulary and structures, which helps memorization.

Songs spark off students' interest and help them remember important items, because they engage emotions. What I mean is that if students care about something, then they will not forget it. According to Chris Brewer: "The more interesting and dramatic, the more easily the information is remembered [11]. Music stabilizes mental, physical and emotional rhythms to attain a state of deep concentration and focus in which large amounts of content information can be processed and learned".

Davanellos argues that songs are part of everyday life. In the car, at home, at sporting events, at times of celebration, in theatres, at the cinema, or in the streets, we constantly hear, sing songs [4]. Thus being the case, why not using them in the language classroom?

Songs can be a source of language for presenting and practicing grammar and syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation and the four skills. Whatever vocabulary students learn, it must be worked into a natural flowing dialogue:

The more fluid and melodious it sounds, the more vivid in imagery and poetic the language, the better it will penetrate the (non-conscious) mind. Simplicity implies ease, and texts should delight the ear [11].

Songs enhance a learning environment due to its affective power, as well as self-esteem. Furthermore, students become more confident in their learning ability and, as a consequence, more motivated to continue learning the language.

We must not forget that there is a clear distinction between hearing and listening. While the former is the simple recognition of sounds, the latter implies some conscious attention to the message of what is said. Timmis goes even further when he mentions "global listening" as a way to "ensure that texts are processed for meaning before they are analysed for language".

Songs can be a tool for learning aesthetical, ideological, moral, religious and linguistic values [6]. They possess the trademark of time and place. The use of songs enables students to bring their sensibility, their abilities and life experiences into the classroom, and, as a consequence, an atmosphere of spontaneous communication, interaction is created.

Songs provide students with a love of culture, improve their sensory awareness,
encourage turn taking, and increase improvisation skills [7]. Songs also promote the use of hand gestures and rhythmic movement, and the format enables public performance.

Songs strive to put learners in an affective environment closer to that of first-language acquisition [11]. Songs also help to relax and unify a class much like a family. With songs, students are encouraged to work into grammar intuitively, not by memorizing rules.

Songs can create a relaxed, pleasant atmosphere, they can be very motivating for students, as they engage the creative, intuitive side of the mind.

What is more, songs can also be incorporated to all language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Nonetheless, as with other activities, a song-related task may also have its failings. As Gregg underlined:

“Some students may feel as intimidated about discussing music, as they would similarly feel about participating in a debate or exposing their opinions openly to the class. Others might even dislike music completely and find they have nothing to say about it” [5].

In my opinion, even the most introverted students vibrate when they listen to a song. Even if learners don’t say a word about it, or refuse to express their points of view on it, when they listen to a song, either they hum it, or they tap their feet to the melody very discreetly.

Songs can be used for a wide variety of activities. They can start discussions on a topic or even become the centre of debate. This is especially true of songs that develop a particular theme. Songs are also great for training the listening skill. One of students’ favourite exercises with songs is completing the blanks as they listen, or listening and choosing the correct words from two words that rhyme, for example *day* and *say*. Teachers can use songs to teach grammar in many ways. Sometimes, songs sacrifice grammar for smooth rhyme, which makes them good grammar teaching tools. Thus being the case, students can be asked to find the mistakes or to say how it should be.

Songs allow the teacher to bring the voices of native speakers into the classroom, and also allow teachers to present a variety of voices and accents to their students[11].

Listening to a foreign language is a very intensive and demanding activity and for this reason I think it is good for students to *breathe* between listening tasks. We may achieve this by asking students to compare their answers. Not only does this give them the chance to have a break from the listening chore, but it is also an opportunity to check their understanding of the text with a peer, and so reconsider before listening to the song again.

**Conclusion.**

To sum up, a song is always a useful tool in teaching a foreign language, as it is a written text with oral patterns involving richness and diversity of topics related to students’ daily lives. What is more, songs can be used for every purpose. They can be used as a warm-up activity, as a background for other activities such as debating or writing.

The meaning of words allows, like in poetry, for many different interpretations, which helps the interaction, the sharing of different opinions between peers.

Songs positively affect language accent, memory, and grammar, as well as mood, enjoyment and motivation. Singing also enables language to stay in the memory, where it can build up connections.
References: