

Teaching Phrasal Verbs Using Songs

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Introduction

Many songs can be successfully employed to provide meaningful contexts for learning phrasal verbs. This will be illustrated through the use of the first four lines of the song "Another Day in Paradise" by Phil Collins.

Procedure

Students were provided with incomplete lyrics.

The students were given incomplete lyrics of the song "Another Day in Paradise" by Phil Collins and were instructed to familiarize themselves with it by going through it silently. Each line contained a blank, which they would be required to fill in as they listened to the song.

Students were asked to fill in the blanks.

After they had familiarized themselves with the lyrics, the next step involved was to expose the students to the song in small chunks of four lines each. Every segment was replayed several times, till most students were confident that they had written in the appropriate words. It was only when the students completed filling in all the blanks contained in the first stanza that any attempt was made to determine how correct or incorrect their answers were.

Students were asked to volunteer information.

Each of the blanks was taken up one by one and every student in the group was asked what word he/she had used in a particular blank. (Since my focus here is on the teaching of phrasal verbs, I'll confine myself to the first blank in the song, which completes the phrasal verb "calls out".) The different answers provided by the students were put up on the blackboard. No attempt was made to weed out the incorrect answers at this stage. As all answers were being accepted, students enthusiastically revealed what they had put down. Some of the answers given for the first blank was (calls) "out", "on", "off", and "up".

Students were asked the meaning of phrasal verbs.

When all the students had volunteered information about the word they had inserted in the first blank, they were asked the meaning of each phrasal verb.

- What is the meaning of "call out"?
- What does "call on" mean?

The meaning of each phrasal verb was discussed individually and when a student provided a definition, which everyone agreed on, it was put up on the blackboard. The participants were asked to use the phrasal verb in a sentence. Examples provided by the students were put up alongside the meaning.

Students were provided with contextual clues.

When the students were unable to define a phrasal verb, there was no attempt to provide them with one. Instead, the phrasal verb was used in a context and all students were expected to guess the meaning. For example, when the students were unable to define

call off", the following context was provided.

"The class is over. You're ready to begin looking through your notes in the short break before the next class. You have a test on that class. Suddenly a student runs into the classroom and shouts that the test is called off as the teacher has left to deal with a family emergency. You are overjoyed, and you throw your books back into your bag and rush to the playground to join the cricket game."

The students were asked to determine the meaning from the context provided. Once the meaning had been arrived at, further examples of how the phrasal verb was used were provided.

- John's appointment with the doctor was called off.
- The teacher called off the meeting.

Students were asked to study the lyrics again.

When the meanings of all the phrasal verbs had been figured out, the students were then asked to study the lyrics again and determine which phrasal verb was demanded by the context. If, for example, all students agreed on "calls out", they were asked to provide cogent arguments why it couldn't be any of the other phrasal verbs that they had initially come up with. Some of the arguments put forward by the students were: people don't visit someone on the street, they can meet them accidentally, but not 'visit'. The grammar does not permit 'call on'. One can 'call on' someone, but not 'call on to' someone. Getting/providing such answers from/to students ensured that they not only remembered the meaning of the phrasal verb but also where and how it should be used.

Conclusion

Using songs provides an ideal context for students to learn new phrasal verbs. The enthusiasm generated by songs will enable the teacher to discuss those phrasal verbs, which have been brought up by the students, and not those randomly selected by the teacher or the textbook writer. Making students learn the songs will ensure that they will remember not only the meaning and also how to use the phrasal verb.

A teacher can build up a collection of songs to use for different purposes, and prepare simple fill-in-the-blank exercises based on the lyrics of the songs. Not only do the students enjoy listening, but they also learn to listen for meaning.