

Focused Listening with Songs

Isaiah WonHo Yoo

iyoo [at] ucla.edu

American Language Center at UCLA Extension (California, USA)

1. **Learners** - Although this type of lesson can be used with students at every level of proficiency, teachers should take into account the proficiency level of their students when selecting a song. Teachers should also consider the complexity of the grammatical and phonological knowledge required of the students in order for their lessons to be effective.

2. **Time** - It can take anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour.

3. **Objective** - To provide students with a focused listening activity where they have an opportunity to use their knowledge in both grammar and phonology of English. The teacher can also use this activity as a starting point for various grammar or pronunciation lessons.

4. **Activities** - Teachers should prepare two types of handouts: a cloze activity and a linking activity.

- A cloze activity can be created by taking out a few "grammatically" important or salient words in the lyrics: for instance, Nothing's (like) it used to be; Impossible (as) it may seem = "although it may seem impossible"; and I should (have) known better. As seen below in the procedures, one important step in the pre-listening phase of this lesson is to have students figure out the missing words in the song, using their grammatical knowledge. Having students predict the missing words is an imperative step in that it allows them an opportunity to study the sentence structures and the meaning of the lyrics.
- One important point when creating a cloze activity with a song is to use blanks sparingly. As a general rule, each line in the lyrics should not have more than one missing word. It is also a good idea not to have any missing words in the first line. I learned these points the hard way by watching my students writing in the answers for the first two blanks when the song is already halfway finished.
- Song lyrics also lend themselves well to linking or blending activities. One of the common mistakes made by nonnative speakers is trying to enunciate each and every word in a sentence. Spoken at a very slow pace, such enunciation of words would not be considered wrong. However, natural speech occurs at a very fast pace, so it is imperative that students learn how to link or blend sounds so as not to sound choppy in their speech. Linking usually occurs between a consonant and a vowel (e.g. *pick up* and *pump it*), but it can also occur between two vowels (e.g. *do I* and *see us*). Blending, on the other hand, occurs between two consecutive occurrences of the same consonant (e.g. *bus stop* and *hot tea*). A linking or blending activity can be created simply by typing out the lyrics, with no blanks, on the back of the cloze activity handout.

5. Procedures

- Pre-listening
 - As a warm-up or schema building activity, ask students what they know about American pop culture: for instance, "Who is the most famous American movie or TV actor/actress in your country?" "Do you have a favorite American singer?" "Do you listen to American pop songs?" "If you do, do you think listening to those songs can help improve your English?" and "In what way, does it help you improve your English skills?" You might also want to bring some pictures or CD's of popular actors or singers to class.
 - Pass out the cloze activity handout, and have students read the lyrics and figure out what the missing words might be, using their knowledge in grammar. Have the students compare their guesses with their neighbors. Ask for volunteers to share their guesses with the class.
- While-listening
 - Students listen for the missing words. Play the song once, and ask students whether they need to listen to the song again. If they do, play it one more time.
- Post-listening
 - After the second listening, go over the answers with the class. If necessary, replay the parts where students had trouble

understanding the words. Go over grammar points as necessary.

6. The **linking activity** can be done in the following way:

- Do the first four lines with the students to make sure that everyone understands what to do.
- Ask them to do the rest of the lyrics, predicting where linking should or might occur.
- Have them compare their predictions with their neighbors.
- Students listen to the song to find out whether their predictions are correct.
- Play the song one more time, if necessary.
- Go over the answers with the class.

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VIII, No. 7, July 2002

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