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**THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN FOREIGN
LANGUAGE TEACHING PROCESS**

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Abstract

With the widespread of computers and new technologies, language teachers are incorporating technology in language classroom environments more and more. Just as technology plays a major key role in almost every aspect of our everyday lives, it plays an equally important role in education. The most important thing in such environments is what kind of technology do we use and how do we utilize it for language teaching and learning. What I'm interested in this article is to show the importance of songs in teaching Italian as a foreign language. This particular kind of material, neglected by most teachers, offers a splendid opportunity to stimulate the interest of students. Songs are authentic materials and reflect young people's concerns. Moreover, songs provide an amusing and relaxing break in the usual routine of classroom activity. Students are challenged with tasks that refer to language skills, grammar and cultural knowledge. Using audio programs helps students hear what the spoken language sounds like in real life. Teacher can use listening programs on any device that has an audio component, such as tablet, smart phone or computer. Students need to hear and use language in order to remember it long-term, and the use of technology provides opportunities for students to practice their language skills by hearing and speaking. Bearing all this in mind, I use songs in higher education with satisfactory results.

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1. Introduction

We, all, agree with the idea that instruction based on technology is of great help for the students and is an important tool in increasing the quality of teaching process. Technology isn't a methodology in itself, but an auxiliary instrument that facilitates the teaching and learning activity in general and that of a foreign language in special. Because of technology, students tend to be more engaged in the process of learning, and have a more positive attitude towards learning.

We confess that "The needs and expectations of learners are constantly changing and increasingly they expect technology-rich and flexible learning opportunities. In addition, many end-users and other learners are working in the context of increased work and time pressures and so demand a shift in balance from face-to-face training sessions to ones that involve a more flexible blend of face-to-face and e-learning activities" (Allan, 2004, p. 2). In fact, we live today in the epoch of technology. Studies have shown that nearly 90% of students have access to some type of computer or mobile device, so is something normal to see the evolution of teaching methods in the direction of technology. Moreover, the expanding presence of new technologies in everyday life along with the fact that more and more students are growing up in digital environment mean that they feel comfortable using technology in language classrooms.

One of the big problems we all face is maintaining students' interest throughout our lectures. Consequently, we often have to be very creative in the techniques we use. What makes music such a great teaching tool is its universal appeal, connecting all cultures and languages. This makes it one of the best and most motivating resources in the foreign language classroom.

In my beginner and intermediate level Italian courses of first and second year in Bachelor program in Italian studies, I regularly use in Textual typology songs to teach Italian language and culture. This subject consists of 4 hours a week, or 60 hours for one semester in the first year and 4 hours a week, or 120 hours in two semesters for the second year. I dedicate nearly 10% of the total duration of a course to the songs in the first year with two hours of work each and 20% in the second year. In this paper I'll share how I use music in my courses and I will give practical suggestions on how to take advantage of songs, music videos to make Italian classes more interesting.

2. Problem Statement

Depending on the school, student body and subject matter, the use of technology serves many purposes. The problem is how technology is used for language learning and what types of technology do we utilize in foreign language classroom? Our job is to teach students a foreign language including the boring rules of grammar and socio-cultural norms of another country. Some of us think that traditional methods satisfy the needs of the students but I think that a simple computer connected to internet and a video projector make learning visible and tangible. Nothing better than such devices can bring into the classroom, fresh and alive, another language and culture. And if the language comes with music is supplementary. Using such tools to be connected with other lands and the life there allows students to see and experience language in a quite different way.

3. Research Questions

- If and how songs are used in foreign language classrooms?
- Is it true that technologies, when used effectively, can greatly increase a learner's contact time with the foreign language?
- What are the trends in the study of teaching Italian with technology?
- To identify if the use of songs is a good strategy in the process of teaching Italian in the university

4. Purpose of the Study

- The present study indicates that teachers use music to foster positive affect, which is believed to be conducive to learning.
- Teachers must use songs to teach clearly defined language skills and linguistic knowledge, such as listening comprehension, speaking fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar as well as cultural norms.
- Students like their classes more when they receive computer assistance in them.
- To analyze the effect of songs in teaching Italian as a foreign language.

5. Research Methods

Using songs with beginners that is students of the first year, is particularly interesting and useful. They, more than everyone else, need support, friendship, motivation, relax in the classroom. The use of songs as didactic material is the best solution for them. At first they feel like a fish out of water, but very soon they find force and courage to face difficulties. In short time they get confidence with the language skills and make gigantic steps for one semester.

With intermediate level, the method is a bit different. They are, already, used with class environments and the use of songs. What is important for them is the selection of songs and especially when linguistic elements are mixed with cultural ones.

6. Findings

Murphey (1992) demonstrated that anything you can do with a text you can do with a song. I strongly believe in it, because among other texts songs have become the most preferred ones. Some years ago I used more literal texts in prose, but last years the students like songs in learning Italian language. One of the reasons of this choice is the fact that they feel at ease with songs and thanks to technology they better digest the linguistic content and cultural norms.

6.1. The importance of songs in foreign language classroom

There is considerable research evidence to suggest that songs can support language learning. Researchers, (Spicher & Sweeney, 2007; Pasqui, 2004; Ting, 2002; Lozanov & Gateva, 1989; Rees, 1977) claim that music and songs in the modern language classroom may provide positive emotional and learning enhancements for students at different ages and stages of learning. Other researchers (Balboni, 1998;

Bancroft, 1995; Murphey, 1992; Anton, 1990) have advanced several pedagogical techniques and recommendations to encourage the incorporation of music and song into the foreign language curriculum. Even teachers (Jensen, 2000) admit that songs can quickly set a positive classroom tone, and improve a foreign language intake in the learning process. Songs create comfortable environments in the class so that students can develop their linguistic skills more easily. I am a firm believer that music makes learning a language much more enjoyable and effective. It helps the students feel relaxed and get rid of their negative attitudes such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence stimulating them emotionally (Kramersch, 1993) and consequently increase their enthusiasm towards studying.

The song is authentic material: the written text of a song or its version recorded with the musical accompaniment undoubtedly constitutes the authentic material, as it is a text produced by native speakers for native speakers. It is not a text prepared for the sake of teaching, but has a content for itself, in short, it lives on its own life, and therefore is more interesting from a cognitive and affective point of view. Through songs students can learn cultural elements that can be elicited by the music, the language, the content of the song itself. The song is one of the most widespread forms of literature with which young people are in contact and often the lyrics are poems of remarkable literary quality: therefore, it could be a good springboard to arouse and extend the interest to literature tout court.

Songs offer the possibility to be presented as a written poetic text, as listening material (to practice listening comprehension) or as audiovisual material (video-clip). The elasticity of this kind of text allows the implementation of different linguistic abilities from time to time: obviously, each of them will be accompanied by the activities which are most suitable for the purpose. Besides, songs stimulate the recognition and production of linguistic rhythms, though we have to confess that Italian folk songs remain faithful to the adaptation of the musical accent to the poetic one.

Songs increases motivation: the "bel canto" is one of the most evident aspects in the image of Italy abroad, for which italians are esteemed and appreciated everywhere. This is true even in Albania. Beyond the opera, loved and followed by young people in many parts of the world, and some famous opera singers, many pop singers are known and appreciated by the students. Classes, at every age level and language competence, are always enthusiastic when you can hear and understand an Italian song, which is therefore an excellent tool to stimulate motivation. Songs are used even as pleasant detachment when students feel tired. It is, already, known the importance of the playful aspect to favor motivation, and with it learning. The songs, inserted at the beginning, at the end or in the course of a teaching unit (to introduce or reinforce a certain grammatical topic, a particular lexical area), allow to interrupt the learning path and to offer a brand motivation not utilitarian, since the foreign language is not only used to satisfy pragmatic needs, but also to obtain an aesthetic pleasure.

Songs facilitates memorization: in the suggestopedic method of Lozanov music is considered an essential tool for relaxation and concentration (Lozanov & Gateva, 1989), but in this case it is not a question of using it simply as a background for other didactic activities or for other objectives, but it is part of the lesson itself and promotes, by virtue of the rhymes, the rhythm and the melody associated with it, the memorization not only of certain words, but also of idiomatic phrases and entire grammatical structures. It also happens that the students, listening outside of the scholastic context of the songs in foreign language that they particularly love, remember some words even without knowing the meaning.

Songs promote repetition: they are a good exercise of imitation that facilitates the articulation of certain sounds and phonic sequences, because the pronunciation of words is guided and facilitated by the musical rhythm. In addition, singing together in group performance helps the most timid students feel less the fear of making mistakes that prevents them from communicating correctly. In other words, songs can be listened to and sung several times with pleasure. This cannot be said of other text types, even short ones. For example, it does not seem to be common practice to read even a short story more than once or twice.

The musical language is "universal": the music that accompanies the words is a universal language and the themes it often deals with are common to all cultures: love, death, nature. In this sense, they are already familiar to students and allow an intercultural comparison on the different attitudes of individual cultures towards certain values. Last but not least the use of songs offers extraordinary possibilities to the dynamics of interaction between student-student or teacher-student.

6.2. Selection parameters of text types

The process of selecting a song is one of the most difficult aspects of using music in a lesson. If we want to choose the right song, we must consider some elements. Griffe (1992) recommends the following elements:

1. Classroom environment (number, age and interests of students; lesson hours)
2. Teacher (teacher's age, interest in music and aim to use the song in the class)
3. Classroom facilities (flexibility in lesson plan, classroom equipment)
4. Music (lesson plan and equipment such as the volume, sources of music, copying machine, board, etc.).

First of all we have to consider the linguistic level of the students. The language level of the class determine not only the songs that we will use, but also what other activities we will use to develop the lesson, such as games or written exercises. I choose simple repetitive lyrics, for beginners and fast-delivered lyrics for intermediate level. Shorter songs are chosen, with simple grammatical structures, Italian pronunciation – let's say - standard, slow rhythm, recurring lexicon, repetition of entire verses, for beginners; longer songs, with more complex grammar and syntax, even regional pronunciation, faster rhythm, richer vocabulary and more complex topics for intermediate level courses. The teacher must examine with care where is going to be focused. Is this going to be a lesson focusing on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or a particular topic?

It is very important to dwell on the content of the song especially when it presents aspects of Italian life or reflects particular social problems and historical periods (for example, *I vecchi* by Claudio Baglioni treats the problem of old persons, *L'italiano* by Toto Cutugno and *Wl'Italia* by De Gregori for the different attitude towards stereotypes about Italianism, *La terra dei cachi* by Elio and the Storie Tese on poor health care and other problems in Italy. The content of the song is in some cases particularly interesting for an intercultural comparison: just to have an example, *I maschi* by Gianna Nannini, *Quello che le donne non dicono* by Enrico Ruggeri allow to introduce an intercultural comparison on the man-woman relationship.

The teacher must choose a song with a substantial coincidence of musical rhythm and linguistic rhythm, or better say loyalty to the rhythm of speech. Sometimes I ask the students to choose a pop or a

rock song discussing with them for their choice. A great website¹ where we can find suggestions on how to teach Italian through music is www.adgblog.it (Accademia del Giglio). On this website, songs are divided into 3 categories, A, B and C, which follow the levels of learning established by the European Framework of Reference for Languages.

6.3. Activities and techniques with songs

6.3.1 Oral comprehension

It is the starting point of the activity. Students can listen to the song many times or easily jump from one side to the other of the text and while singing they can even record their voice in order to compare their pronunciation with the original one. Then they are invited to sing along with the source kept at low volume. Singing is a good exercise of imitation that facilitates the articulation of certain sounds and phonic sequences because the pronunciation is led and facilitated by the musical rhythm (Costamagna, 2000). But the most interesting point that Balboni (1998) underlines is the fact that the student is forced to follow the pace of the source and as a consequence he/she is forced to speak rapidly, something that he/she would not dare to do otherwise. The phase of pure listening introduces the work on other language skills through listening-repetition (for the purpose of enhancement, so techniques that increase fixation), and listening-silent reading and listening-reading-repeat aloud (graphemic images are combined with sound images without necessarily going through an analytical spelling). My favourite strategy is to give some words from the song and ask to them to listen out for the words that rhyme with them or invite the students to underline words that seem unfamiliar to them.

6.3.2 Grammer

It is the most commonly choice made by the authors of manuals and teachers in the construction of the teaching units based on the songs. It is worth mentioning in this context the grammatical flexibility and 'poetic licence' in the construction of song lyrics. Students often expect songs to obey the grammatical rules that have been drummed into them, but in some cases the rules are broken.

We said above that the song is chosen in base of the grammatical argument we want to focus on. If we want to explain the infinitive form of Italian verbs we work with the song *Nel blu dipinto di blu* by Domenico Modugno. The famous song has some catchy examples of infinitives that students are invited to memorize as well as some uses of the imperfect tense. The song *In bicicletta* by Riccardo Cocciante demonstrates all sorts of verbs in the present continuous (the -ando, -endo forms). The difference between the perfect (*ha fatto*) and the imperfect (*faceva*) in the song *Un Raggio di Sole* by Jovanotti. When we teach the imperative with pronouns, I use *Baciarmi ancora* by Jovanotti. Always by the same singer we use the song *Bella* to explain definite and indefinite articles. When we want to speak about adjective-noun agreement we use *Attenti al lupo* by Lucio Dalla ect. According to the topic we organize the exercises.

¹ Other websites are: www.italica.rai.it; www.galleriadellacanzone.it; www.italianissima.net; <http://www.freeuniverse.it/testi-canzoni.htm>; <http://www.tuttotesti.com/italiani/a.asp>; <http://www.tuttogratis.it>, or in Youtube <http://www.youtube.com>.

6.3.3 Vocabulary, idioms and expressions.

Teaching vocabulary is another important reason for using songs. We said that students, often, memorize the words of a song without knowing their meanings, now it's time to explain the meaning of all the new words. Mezzadri (2003), among other techniques used to facilitate vocabulary memorization, presents association through the rhythm, a technique used for teaching children and based on the similarities between words, rhythm and music. Repetition is considered one of the most important aspects of vocabulary learning. Someone claims that "the repetitive nature of the lyrics can promote the learning of formulaic chunks of language that can be used as readymade expressions in future conversations" (Abbott, 2002, p.10). Several studies on the retention of songs in a native language have provided evidence that frequent repetition is also essential when memorizing lyrics (McElhinney & Annett, 1996; Wallace, 1994).

The new words (supposed to be the underlined ones that we spoke above) are explained one by one in their context, but sometimes the second or third meaning is proposed in word combination or phrases. So we take advantage of the contextualised presentation of target words in the lyrics to foster the acquisition of deeper aspects of word knowledge such as grammatical functions, collocations and associations. We perform several activities like cloze exercises, students have to fill in the text with the words that have been omitted, reordering of the words, combining or substituting of the linguistic elements of the text, filling in the blanks, identifying mistakes.

Last but not least, we teach even Italian culture. Songs can tell much more about a country than any other text. Some particular songs do not only reproduce the reality of a country, but they also represent it, reformulate certain aspects of it. The songs that we propose represent the most significant aspects of Italian life, in which historical, cultural, linguistic developments are mirrored.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, music is constantly present in my Italian courses where songs serve many different purposes. I find music a very powerful tool to establish and strengthen my relationship with my students, and to make my Italian classes more interesting and fun.

The advantage of song is that it can be listened to over and over again. Another common goal of song-use is the teaching of authentic language and culture, and a chance for students to be away from bookish Italian. In addition, songs give to the students, particularly those "who are shy", the opportunity to learn and produce language without feeling observed during the sing-along, and this is another teaching goal.

We usually say that music is for the soul, so the relaxed atmosphere influence positively the students' attitude and learning environment: a relaxed atmosphere is seen as aiding learning success, creativity and interaction.

Songs can be seen as useful tools in academic levels not only with students of Italian studies, but even with other students that learn Italian as a foreign language.

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