

Review of G. Ilčiukienė's Monograph "Muzikos poveikis mokant anglų kalbos pradiniam etapui"

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Dr Ilčiukienė's monograph argues convincingly for placing music at centre of L2 language curriculum in the Lithuanian primary school in face of the fact that music has up to the present time been treated as an ancillary classroom activity in the L2 primary classroom in Lithuania. (This is also the case in most European L2 primary curricula such as in Britain and Germany where the musical activities are usually confined to the status of an optional extra and, at most, are regarded as an effective form of consolidation of material covered in any particular language input unit in a course book.) Ilčiukienė's argumentation demonstrates not only that music motivates learners by providing a more relaxing and enjoyable classroom atmosphere (positive affect) and that the prosodic features music can provide an excellent basis for acquiring English intonation but also that music can even facilitate the acquisition of syntax, idiom and lexis. For these reasons alone, music should acquire a new status in L2 primary courses.

Ilčiukienė's approach is embedded in the main current methodologies for L2 acquisition. With regard to Steven Krashen's notion of the affective filter, i. e. that language learning is impeded if factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence are prevalent in the L2 classroom, Ilčiukienė argues that the positive affect created by music in the classroom enables optimal learning to take place as anxiety levels can be diminished for primary school children by an appropriate choice of music. (This aspect in the monograph (Ilčiukienė 2010: 200) is backed up by reference to physiological studies). Similarly, the "Tomatis Effect"¹ within the context of the *suggestopedia* approach is positively enhanced by music so that students listen in an active way rather passively hearing without assimilation of the presented material. In addition, the Din factor² as quoted by Ilčiukienė (Ilčiukienė 2010: 198) is increased by music. This has also been argued by Stansell (2005: 29).

Working within the *Total Physical Response* (TPR) method (Asher, 1965: 291-300), Ilčiukienė shows that songs accompanied by actions reinforce the learning process. Songs

¹ The "Tomatis Effect" emphasises the distinction between (conscious) listening and (passive) hearing. For effective listening to take place, there must be an element of motivation on the part of the listener. In the L2 classroom, music can provide the positive affect for listening (and thus acquisition) to take place.

² This is similar to the effect of having a tune constantly repeating itself in one's head (Song Stuck In My Head Phenomenon (SSIMHP (Murphey: 1990))), but this phenomenon can be a positive factor for embedding language in the memory.

such as *Itsy Bitsy Spider* or *Ring-a-Ring o' Roses* are well-known effective and enjoyable classroom action songs for young children, but adult action songs such as the *Hokey Cokey*, which is still popular today at dances and parties, can be adapted to the primary L2 classroom in order to teach the lexical field of body parts and directions *right/left* together with *in/out*. The participants stand in a circle, recite or sing the lyrics³ and do the actions at the same time:

*Put your right foot in,
Take your right foot out,
And you shake it all about.
You do the Hokey Pokey
And you turn around,
That's what it's all about.
Oh the Hokey Cokey
Put your left foot in etc. (hand/arm, leg etc.)*

However, great care must be taken for the choice of the song as infelicitous rhyme or metre may have a negative effect. This could explain why Bergner's (2007) study concerning the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition via *action songs* was relatively inconclusive as, unlike the *Hokey Cokey*, the choice of song given in the experimental sample fails to meet the basic criteria of simplicity and clarity:

*I'm a frog,
And I jump up high,
I'm a frog,
And I catch a fly
When I sit in the pond
On my lily pad
All the little fish ask
"Who is that?" (Bergner 2007: 250)*

The clarity and simplicity of the first four lines are highly effective as an action song for the young learner and the semantic import can be rendered unambiguously with a little help from the teacher, but the last four lines introduce obscure lexical items (*lily pad*) for this context and the final two lines end on a note of uncertainty and bathos. The action for *asking* is weak in contrast with *jumping* and *catching* and the final line not only fails to scan but also ends on a displeasing questioning note. This example highlights the fact that more qualitative

³ There are numerous versions of this song together with music to be found on the internet simply by 'googling' *Hokey Cokey*.

research is needed in this area to establish useful criteria concerning the effectiveness of musical and rhythmical input in the L2 curriculum. It is insufficient to argue that *any* song can aid language acquisition. On the other hand, it can be convincingly argued that *some* songs can be enormously effective in this area.

With regard to the acquisition of syntax and lexis, Ilčiukienė applies Krashen's input + 1 theory to illustrate the importance of music within L2 acquisition. According to this model, language input in the classroom should contain mainly known material (input = (i)), alongside some new material (+1). A fine balance has to be struck. If the input is too high, then the learners will be overtaxed and will tend to 'switch off' i.e. become passive *hearers* rather than *listeners* as in the *Tomatis Effect*. Conversely, if the input is too low, by definition little new learning will take place; at best there will be some consolidation and at worst this will result in bored *hearers* of English. Ilčiukienė offers a good example of the i+1 theory with narrative songs containing a chorus. The chorus provides the (relatively known) input (i) whereas the + 1 information is supplied by new information in the narrative verses. This principle can be further applied to any song which may be familiar to the learner (i), but where new elements may be introduced (+ 1). As is already well known by many teachers of English, a song such as *Old McDonald Had a Farm* can be extended to cover virtually every species of farm animal depending on the pupils' lexical levels or the cumulative rhyme *The House that Jack Built* can be taught in stages to control the +1 aspect of the input level. (This is also useful for inculcating four-level stress patterns. (Gledhill 207: 235-236))

Ilčiukienė has carried out experiments to show that suitably selected songs can create conditions for the acquisition of relatively difficult syntactical structures as well as less common lexical items. The repetition of the song and melody facilitate the pronunciation of the content so that syntactical structures can be absorbed in a natural and discreet fashion. The context similarly clarifies the content so that lexical items can be more easily assimilated. This can be illustrated by the poem and song *If All the World Were Paper*:

If all the world were paper

And all the sea were ink,

If all the trees were bread and cheese

What would we do for drink?

In this ditty (which can be sung or recited), a type two concessive clause (if clause-imperfect subjunctive, main clause - conditional tense) can be effortlessly acquired by the young learners. The extreme impossibility of the world being made of paper and of the sea consisting of ink highlights the hypothetical nature of the scenario with the result that the

semantic import of the subjunctive mood and conditional tense is made clear. In turn, the (simple) rhyme and rhythm not only make the complex formulation palatable (and even amusing), the content can be comfortably embedded in the memory. It is well known that rhythmic language uses both hemispheres of the brain, but with particular emphasis on the right hemisphere as argued by Nietz (2010: 9-12), which has positive implications for the memory with regard to storage in the hippocampus. The memory is also reinforced by the kalogenetic effect caused partly by the release of endorphins such as opioid peptides. The later less simple verses can also be added, following the (i +1) principle.

Ilčiukienė illustrates how songs, intonational and rhythmic chants not only increase motivation but they also facilitate acquisition of supra-segmental features of English such as melody and rhythm. Gledhill (2007: 231-239) argues along similar lines that traditional popular English poems and songs (misleadingly called nursery rhymes) provide ideal material for the acquisition of the supra-segmental aspects of English such as weakening, assimilation and elision as well as having the potential to highlight nuclear tones and four-level accenting. The well-known non-sense rhyme *Hey Diddle Diddle* can be taken as an example of weakening in the conjunction *and* (ænd) to ən:

*Hey diddle diddle, the cat **and** the fiddle,*

The cow jumped over the moon.

The little dog laughed to see such fun

And the dish ran away with the spoon.

The teacher does not need to point out the phenomenon of weakening directly, but instead, by concentrating on the rhythm, weakening will take place automatically. This can be seen from the clear metrical pattern produced by the nonsensical rhythmic formulation *Hey Diddle Diddle*:

heɪ 'dɪdl 'dɪdl

● ● ● ● ●

The rhythm in turn encourages a rapid rendition of the second line to follow this set metrical pattern and thus weakening ensues subliminally because the strong form 'and' would disturb the rhythmical sequence:

ðə kæt ən ðə fɪdl

● ● ● ● ● ●

Many other examples can be adduced to illustrate the effectiveness of these kinds of rhymes for their phonological features such as the phenomenon of assimilation in particular in the well-known song *Ten Green Bottles* :

Ten green bottles

Hanging on the wall

Ten green bottles

Hanging on the wall

And if one green bottle

Should accidentally fall

There'd be nine green bottles

Hanging on the wall

Tench (2011: 105-106) illustrates how a formal spoken version of the song misses many aspects of connected speech such as elision, weakening, contraction and assimilation:

'ten 'gri:n 'bɒtlz

'hæŋŋ 'ɒn ði: 'wɔ:l

'ten 'gri:n 'bɒtlz

'hæŋŋ 'ɒn ði: 'wɔ:l

'ænd if 'wɒn 'gri:n 'bɒtl

ʃʊd 'æksɪdentəli fɔ:l

'ðeə 'wʊd 'bi: 'naɪn 'gri:n 'bɒtlz

'hæŋŋ 'ɒn ði: 'wɔ:l

However, in the sung or chanted versions, all these aspects of connected speech are included as highlighted:

'teŋ 'gri:m 'bɒtlz

'hæŋŋ 'ɒn ðə 'wɔ:l

'teŋ 'gri:m 'bɒtlz

'hæŋŋ 'ɒn ðə 'wɔ:l

'ænd if 'wɒn 'gri:m 'bɒtl

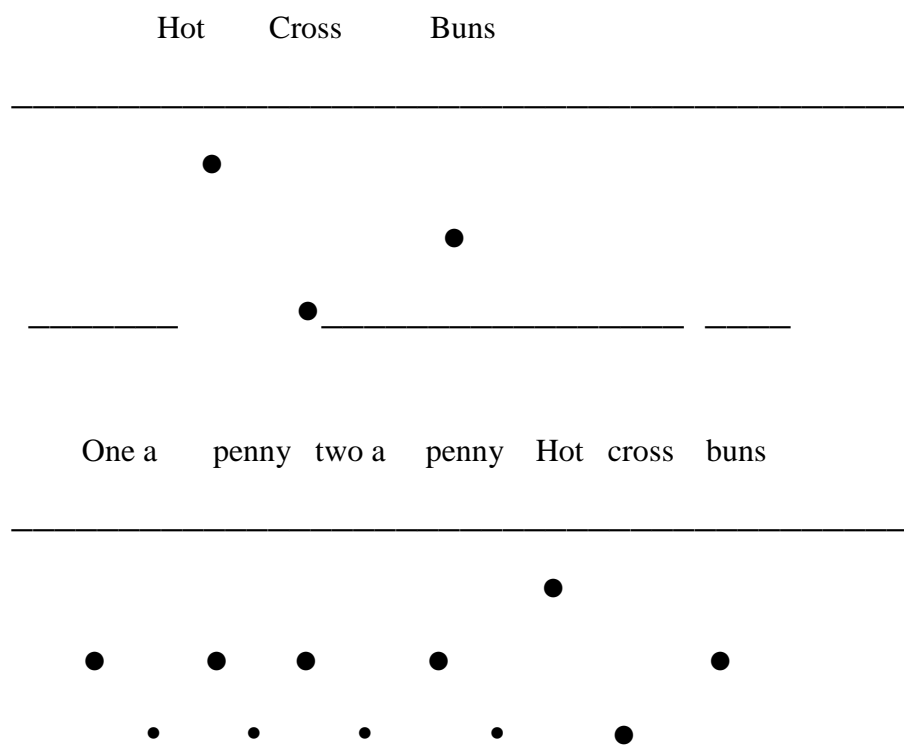
ʃəd 'æksɪ'dentli fɔ:l

'ðəb 'bi 'naɪŋ 'gri:m 'bɒtlz

'hæŋŋ 'ɒn ðə 'wɔ:l

Theoretically, given access to a sung version by native speakers, the pupils singing this song should automatically absorb these supra-segmental aspects. In addition to the important prosodic features, knowledge of numbers is consolidated by the reverse counting of one to ten in the song. Also, different lexical items can be substituted for the colour *green* and the objects *bottles* without affecting the basic metre as long as no words of more than two syllables are included.

Many traditional English songs and nursery rhymes reflect spoken melodies such as those of any street vendor in the song: *Hot Cross Buns*. For anyone who knows this song, it can be seen how close the spoken melody is to the sung version. The spoken version can be represented as below with a three-tonal scale (high, mid, low) and with three levels of stress as represented by the dot size:



Other examples of songs and nursery rhymes which closely reflect spoken melodies include the following: *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *Three Blind Mice*, *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean*, *Pussy Cat Pussy Cat Where Have You Been?* and *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. Some sung versions such as *Jack and Jill* miss aspects such as the weakening of *and* in the first line and so it is important to recite the short poems rhythmically as well as using the sung version.

It can be seen from Ilčiukienė's research and the references in this review that songs are of such vital importance in the L2 classroom that they should become an essential part of

the curriculum. Many of the songs can be rhythmically chanted and so no great musical demands need to be made on the teacher. Particularly with regard to nursery rhymes, there is a huge range of music CDs for children, which the less musically confident teacher can use as a means of support. As the choice of songs is often arbitrary and, as Ilčiukienė points out, many of the songs in the textbooks are of a poor musical quality, more qualitative research with regard to assimilability, effectiveness and rhythm is needed to find criteria to select the most suitable songs for the L2 classroom. The age of the pupils together with their level of language competence factors to be taken into consideration for these activities. Similarly, it is also important to cater for different learner types. Ilčiukienė's monograph has opened up many new areas of research which should not only make language learning more effective but also and, almost of equal importance, more fun.

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8

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