

The use of rhymes and songs in the Teaching of English in Primary Education

El uso de rimas y canciones en la enseñanza de inglés en Educación Primaria

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Resumen

La mayoría de nosotros seguramente estaría de acuerdo en que las canciones, una vez aprendidas, son muy difíciles de olvidar. Además, los profesores de inglés comprenden la importancia del uso de rimas y canciones en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje por sus muchos beneficios. Aunque los niños tienen una capacidad innata para aprender cualquier idioma extranjero, no lo aprenden bien si encuentran las clases aburridas. De hecho, los niños aprenden mejor a través de actividades interesantes. El objetivo principal de este artículo es hacer hincapié en la importancia del uso de rimas y canciones en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera a niños jóvenes. Sus funciones, criterios de elección y la forma de presentarlos a la clase también serán analizados. Por esta razón, las rimas y las canciones son herramientas muy útiles para enseñar una lengua extranjera. En realidad, son las herramientas que ayudan a los niños a aprender en un ambiente agradable y relajado, sin la necesidad de hacer sentir la presión de aprender una lengua extranjera.

Palabras Clave: niños, enseñanza del inglés, educación primaria, rimas, canciones

Abstract

Most of us would surely agree that songs, once learned, are very hard to forget. Besides, experienced teachers of English understand the importance of using rhymes and songs in the teaching-learning process for their many benefits. Although children have an innate ability to learn any foreign language, they do not learn it properly if they find their lessons boring. In fact, children learn better through interesting activities. The main objective of this article is to emphasise the importance of using rhymes and songs in the teaching of English as a foreign language to young learners. Their functions, criteria for election and the ways of presenting them to the class will also be analysed. For this reason, rhymes and songs are very useful tools to teach them a foreign language. Actually, they are the tools that help children learn in an enjoyable and relaxed environment without the necessity of making them feel the pressure of learning a foreign language.

Keywords: children, FL teaching, primary education, rhymes, songs

Teaching rhymes and songs in Primary Education to the students may be beneficial for them both inside and outside the school. It also provides an excellent opportunity to increase the skills of students in the area of foreign language through the follow-up activities of writing, reading, or practicing the skills taught in class.

Introduction

Traditionally, conventional methods in the teaching of English as a foreign language, such as plain explaining and drilling, are unappealing and can be very monotonous to the students. Hence, this will inexorably affect and obstruct their spirit to learn that foreign language. New syllabuses are developed to depict the natural use of language in the real world so that the children can use the language and perform it pleasingly. And one of the main ways to achieve this goal is by means of the use of rhymes and songs. Their use in the teaching of English is undoubtedly very natural. We cannot deny that, as human beings, we have a special ear for music. If we try teaching alphabets to a child, for example, we will realize that the child picks them up faster and hence will memorize them better if we sing them out for them. Songs are a form of language that use tones and rhythm and they are also the media of universal language for everybody. Language and music are known to have similar communicative modes. According to

Peacock, “they are aurally and orally transmitted, they both contain phonetic, syntactic and semantic components and they develop early in life as social interactive media” (Peacock 1997, pág. 51).

Many writers share the opinion that children are more motivated and stimulated in the foreign language classroom when authentic materials (rhymes, songs, realia...) are used rather than the artificial non-authentic materials (course books). Authentic materials increase the children’s level of involvement and concentration. This is the main accurate reason why rhymes and songs are the chief models of teaching the basic lessons to a child in the early years of life. Actually, different scientific research has shown off that the melody echoes in the child’s mind and the child soon grows familiar with the music and with the accompanying task. Taking that perspective into account, the current official English language teaching programs are chasing in on this natural human fondness for music enhanced by the use and further exploitation of songs in the teaching of the foreign language. Nonetheless, there are still quite a few more valid reasons for the use of songs in the teaching of English in Primary Education. Above all, songs are generally a real authentic source of language, valid for all purposes. Since a large part of the world nowadays listens to either English songs or songs in English, it will be more fun, for us and the children alike, to acquire a proper mastery of English or at least an adequate and desirable one.

Another important reason is that songs make up a powerful means of teaching English at all ages. We can use songs as a classroom activity in order to enrich our students’ vocabulary or to improve their grammar and the different English accents. Adding that rhymes and songs are basic elements of each human society does not constitute any update or novelty. They show many aspects of the culture of each society as they occur in all phases of our life, from birth to death. Since they play an important role in the process of learning and using our mother tongue, they are also quite important in the learning of any foreign language, and especially for young learners. Along this article, we aim to describe the importance of using rhymes and songs in the teaching of English as a foreign language at a primary level.

Literature review for the use of rhymes and songs in the FL classroom

The concept of songs has been found to have positive effects on the classroom climate. The most successful lessons are the ones which give us the feeling of enjoyment and good time. Enjoyable learning has to be more effective than the traditional teacher-centred procedures. Music is a proven teaching tool which fosters language retention and production in young children. According to Medina, “using music in the classroom will help our students succeed as FL students” (Medina 1993, pág. 8). There are a few reasons for the use of rhymes and songs in the teaching of a foreign language in Primary Education. Quoting Phillips: “Naturally, children really enjoy learning and singing songs and have fun doing activities while reciting rhymes” (Phillips 1993, pág. 100). However, there are also some deeper aspects such as psychological, cultural, and linguistic, which are worth mentioning and considering.

Children grow up with rhymes and songs to develop their mother tongue. Besides being the most important aspect of the spoken language, rhymes and songs make up the first experienced parts of communication in the children’s mother tongue. Singing songs not only helps children remember important information but it also makes the classroom learning more lively, as it was stated by Linda Campbell and Bruce Campbell (cf. 1996, pág. 58). Most researchers revealed that using songs give a great influence in educational settings. Therefore, rhymes and songs give children an intimate feeling, a relevant and special link with their human environment and as such influence the acquisition of their first language in a quite notorious and important way. Georgi Lozanov¹⁴, the Bulgarian educator, incorporated music into his teaching method. For him, music was instrumental in creating a relaxing and comfortable environment which can propel language learning.

Murphey (1992a) found that the majority of English teachers use or have used songs for different teaching purposes. According to him, it seems that songs stick in both our short and long memory so they are a relatively easy way to remember quite long portions of language. He also found out that songs may be exploited as effectively as any other text. They can be a source of language for presenting and practising grammar and syntax,

¹⁴ Georgi Lozanov (1926 –2012) was a Bulgarian [educator](#) and [psychiatrist](#) who developed [suggestopedia](#), a learning/teaching theory based on his early-1960s study of suggestion, which is known as “suggestology”.

vocabulary, pronunciation, and the different skills of listening, reading, speaking, writing and translation. In short, Coromina (1993, pág. 20) defends that a good song can prompt interesting discussion in class. When children enjoy learning English through songs, they will indirectly make the effort to learn the lyrics of the songs they are actually listening to. Many educators report success using music as a warm up and relaxation tool, as a background for other activities, and as the inspiration for writing activities (cf. Eken 1996, pág.46).

Being a combination of music and language, songs have innumerable virtues that deserve our attention. According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (2000, pág. 147), their richness in culture and themes, their idiomatic and poetic expressions, and their therapeutic functions make them a flawless tool for language teaching in primary education. Language and music are interwoven in songs to communicate a cultural reality in a very unique way. English songs endow speakers with an opportunity to put across their own culture with others. In Kramsch's words: "Language expresses, embodies and symbolises cultural reality" (2000, pág. 3). Songs are highly expressive. Some convey love and emotions, some tell a memorable and moving story, some embody one's dreams and ideals, and some reminisce about the past. Songs are abundant in themes or topics and expressions which will have an echo in the learner's heart. This is what Rivers (1997, pág. 93) referred to as the expressiveness of songs. The use of songs as material is believed to help introducing the individuals with sounds, stress and rhythmic patterns, vocabulary, intonation, grammatical and conversational exchanges (cf. Davanellos 1999, pág. 33). Music positively affects language accent, memory and grammar as well as mood, enjoyment and motivation.

Attached to the development of the mother tongue, there are also several points which support and justify the foreign language acquisition on the children at the early stages: rhymes and songs produce a positive feeling; children may not understand all the words in the rhyme or song, but they do not feel inhibited to sing or act it out by themselves; and rhymes and songs support vocabulary and structure learning. According to Phillips, rhymes and songs are taught "to practice the sounds, rhythms and stress patterns of English" (1993, pág. 108). That pupils' motivation to learn largely depends on the teaching methods does not constitute any update or novelty. But if the teacher skilfully uses rhymes and songs, the children are usually highly motivated. Following Murphey's definition: "rhymes and songs are relaxing; they vary the lesson's progress, they provide fun and action, and above all, they encourage harmony within a group" (1992b, pág. 8).

Use and limitations of rhymes and songs in Primary Education

The use of rhymes and songs in the primary classroom is an important tool for language acquisition, not only for the mother tongue language but also for the foreign one. They introduce new vocabulary, culture, and focus on pronunciation and intonation in a way that is quite easy for the children to follow and learn steadily.

All children take great delight in the use of rhymes and songs. Besides, many different educators have continuously written on the many benefits of rhymes and songs in the teaching of a foreign language (cf. Orlava 1997; Enright and McCloskey 1988; Curtain and Dahleberg 2004). These benefits can just be summarised under two main factors or headings: linguistic factors and affective factors. Among the former, *linguistic factors*, rhymes and songs are useful to enlarge the vocabulary background of children, to develop pupils' listening and speaking skills, and to introduce and familiarise children with the foreign language culture, to improve the children's pronunciation, to teach different language functions, and to develop auditory discrimination. Among the latter, *affective factors*, rhymes and songs favour children to add fun to learning, to motivate them to participate, to help teachers get closer to their children, to stimulate children's interest in the foreign language, and to create a lively atmosphere in the language classroom. Besides these factors, the use of rhymes and songs provides both students and teachers with many other benefits. To reckon these benefits will help us smooth the classroom atmosphere so as to create an appropriate learning environment.

Starting with the benefits for children, not only does singing leave a deep trace in the memory but it also has a number of other benefits for the language learner. Singing allows the children to be actively involved in their learning from a very young age. Singing as a classroom activity can also address the whole child and not just the foreign language learner since songs often draw on their common experiences outside the language classroom. There are rhymes and songs alike for almost every theme, topic or occasion. Not only can we practice common language topics such as numbers, colours, animals or food, but we can also explore a range of emotions and situations that are part of the child's everyday life. Songs linked to calendar events, such as festivals or holidays may also give the children insights into their own and other cultures.

The physical benefits of singing should not either be underestimated. Singing not only has positive effects on breathing and voice control but it also exercises all the muscles of the head and neck. As songs are often

combined with action and movement, they can also help with developing their coordination.

Singing is something that many children will already be familiar with from their experiences at home with their parents or siblings. Indeed, songs can also provide an important bridge between the classroom and the home. Parents are frequently delighted to hear their children singing the songs that they have learned in class. On the other hand, singing as a classroom activity has a lot to offer the teacher. As we mentioned above, rhymes and songs can cover common language themes and topics for this age group and they can be used to practice a wide variety of both vocabulary and expressions.

Songs may contain lots of repetition and can provide enjoyable opportunities to work on pronunciation. They can combine well with other classroom activities such as stories, games, dance, etc. But they can also combine with some paper-based activities, such as picture, colour, or number dictation. Singing can have beneficial effects not only on the students' enjoyment but also on their motivation, and it can hence be an enjoyable way to channel their needs to move around and make a noise. Besides, it can be useful for varying the pace and energy levels of the class and it can be used at any point in the class either to calm down or to stimulate the children. It also allows the teacher a whole class grouping, other than the regular one. Even those who are not ready to sing can join in with certain actions.

Rhymes and songs are important elements of each culture. By learning this authentic material, the children get to know certain parts of a foreign culture. It also satisfies the children's natural curiosity about everything that is new. Being familiar with rhymes and songs in a foreign language, the children feel closer to that foreign culture and its language. The foreign culture is interesting and worth being discovered. It is an important contribution to the development of values such as tolerance and open-mindedness. And these values can be worked on through rhymes and songs. Although there are many reasons why songs can be considered a valuable teaching tool, there are certain issues to consider. As Richards and Lockhart remark, "the language, vocabulary, and sentence structure of some songs can be quite different from that used in spoken English" (1969, pág. 163).

Moreover, the English teacher also finds out some other challenges in class if we aim to keep a wide choice of song variation in the classroom. As Millington stated, "although children are happy to sing the same song on several occasions, interest in the same song can soon fade away if the song

is used too often” (2011, pág. 137). Some teachers, especially those non-native English-speaking ones, may also worry about teaching the stress and timing of songs correctly, and are, therefore, probably more likely to use only certain songs that they feel comfortable with.

Songs as pedagogical tools

One advantage of using songs in the young learner classroom is their flexibility. Songs can be used for a number of purposes and there are many reasons why songs can be considered a valuable pedagogical tool. But perhaps the greatest benefit to using rhymes and songs in the foreign language classroom is that they can be fun. Pleasure for its own sake is an important part of learning any foreign language, something which is often overlooked by us. Besides, rhymes and songs can add interest to the classroom routine and potentially improve the students’ motivation. Purcell (1992) understands that the benefits of songs as pedagogical tools can be analysed under the following headings: listening skills, speaking skills, vocabulary practice, sentence structures and sentence patterns.

Regarding the *listening skills*, students can become bored by repeatedly listening to a narration or dialogue as they attempt to understand the meaning of new words or phrases in context. In contrast, listening to a song over and over again can seem less monotonous because of the rhythm and melody. Songs can also help to improve the listening skills because they provide students with practice listening to different forms of intonation and rhythm. English has a stress-timed rhythm for which songs can help to establish a feeling.

As for the *speaking skills*, children are often keen to learn how to make new sounds and this can take a great deal of practice. Songs can allow young children to practice a new sound without producing the same level of boredom. Songs also have a natural rhythm with a recurring beat that is similar to the stress patterns of spoken English. Hence, these patterns make some songs useful for practicing rhythm and stress.

Songs can also provide the opportunity for *vocabulary practice*. They are usually based around a theme or topic that can provide the context for vocabulary learning. Most children’s songs are characterised by monosyllabic words, many of which are frequently repeated. This repetition offers greater exposure to these words. Some of the vocabulary and language used in traditional and popular English songs, however, can cause difficulties for young learners due to their use of low frequency and archaic

words. The song and the lyrics need to be selected carefully to complement the target vocabulary. An extra difficulty for teachers is finding and selecting songs that are suitable both in terms of vocabulary and topic or theme.

Many children's songs have a simple *sentence structure or sentence pattern* that can become set in the mind of the learner. The length of a phrase in a children's song is short and often uses simple conversational language. Songs can be used to reinforce questions taught in the classroom.

According to Feierabend (2000, pág. 10), it has been found that very young children will imitate songs and their favourite songs. Besides entertaining children's natural liking for music, the use of this type of materials in the classroom has some clear benefits. Following the classification proposed by him, the first step is exposure to rhymes and word families: rhyming words are very common in rhymes and children's songs. They help to introduce children to common word families in English. When children get to learn these letter combinations and how they are spelled and spoken, they will have a sense of the general sound patterns of English and the spelling system. Second, exposure to patterned language: children's songs are full of patterned language. The same language forms are repeated a few times in the song. This is very helpful for pupils in their learning of the language as they can acquire the language form unconsciously while singing the song. Third, learning of vocabulary and rhythm: rhymes and songs are very natural sources of vocabulary and examples of how rhythm works. In an enjoyable manner, pupils build up their vocabulary banks and learn to appreciate the rhythmic pattern of English. By doing so, they provide with the necessary tools for creative writing while enjoying the music. Fourth, exposure to language used in more creative ways: rhymes and songs are often composed using very creative and humorous language. Very often the contents of rhymes and songs deal with matters related to food, toys, animals, relatives, and friends. This shows pupils the wide range of possibilities they can have and hence stimulates their creativity. Finally, exposure to cultural phenomena: most rhymes and songs are composed to express one's experienced or feelings towards a particular thing, person or incident. They are vivid expressions of the traditions, cultural phenomena, and values of the countries from which they come. Teachers can expose them to the cultures of different countries and encourage them to compare other cultures with their own.

Typology of rhymes and songs

There are many different types of rhymes and songs which can be used for Primary Education. Quoting the classification offered by Reilly and Ward (2003, pág. 23), we can distinguish the following types of rhymes and songs which are commonly used in the foreign language classroom: (i) rhymes and songs about character sketches: they develop a sense of rhythm (*Little Miss Muffet*); (ii) rhymes and songs about scenes or incidents: they support the acquisition of gesture meaning and the use of non-verbal expressions (*Jack and Jill*); (iii) rhymes riddles: they introduce the sounds and rhythms of English (*Humpty Dumpty*); (iv) rhymes and songs that use colour words: they develop the children's senso-motor abilities (*The Colour Song*); (v) rhymes and songs that use telling the time: these songs train the children's concentration (*What Time Is It?*); (vi) rhymes and songs that use days of the week: they also help develop the children's concentration (*Solomon Grundy*); (vii) rhymes and songs that use months of the year: they help children develop their memory and concentration (*12 Months are in a year*); (viii) rhymes and songs that mention holidays: these songs are suitable for deepening the special vocabulary and for celebrating these occasions in the school (*Rudolph the red-noised reindeer*); (ix) rhymes and songs that use the alphabet: they are useful to train the sounds of the English alphabet (*ABC Song*); (x) rhymes and songs that discuss about the weather: these songs support the acquisition of vocabulary according to a special topic (*How is the weather?*); and (xi) rhymes and songs that use numbers: these songs support the learning of numbers and are often connected with the use of fingers (*Ten Little Indians*).

In the case of rhymes and songs, it is important to remember that the content is meant to be relevant and useful for the children. For this purpose, following another classification offered by Graham (1994, pág. 12), there are commonly used processes that help students in the development of memory, which is essential in the language learning process: (i) imaging: creating a mental picture (*Jack and Kill*); (ii) method of location (loci): ideas or things to be remembered are connected to objects located in a familiar location (*Head and Shoulders*); (iii) pegword method: ideas or things to be remembered are connected to specific words (*1-bun, 2-shoe...*); and (iv) rhyming: information to be remembered is arranged in a rhyme (*30 Days hath September*).

Feierabend (2000: 35) has classified children's songs in seven categories based on their content, rhythm and function: (i) songtales: simple stories set to music in which there is a simple plot and at least one character (*Jack and*

Jill); (ii) lullabies: songs sung for babies or young children to make them sleep (*All the Pretty Little Horses*); (iii) call and response: songs that involve at least two parties who interchange in singing as in a dialogue (*Did You Feed My Cow?*); (iv) wiggles and tickles: songs that allow the singer to tickle a child's finger or toes (*The Little Mice Go Creeping*); (v) tapping and clapping: songs that allow the singer to touch or clap different parts of their body following the rhythm of the song (*Hickory Dickory Dock*); (vi) Simple songs: songs with a very limited melodic range, sung while children are walking around in a circle (*The Mulberry Bush*); and (vii) bounces: songs that adults sing with young children while bouncing them on their legs (*Humpty Dumpty*).

Selection criteria

Most rhymes and songs for children can be divided into clearly separated groups, such as numbers, animals, food, body parts, actions, etc. though some may combine two or more of these topics, as in the case of *Alice the Camel*, which is a number song about an animal.

Some songs are specifically about actions, as *This is the way we brush our teeth*, where children mime the action they are singing about. Many songs, although not specifically about action, use actions to reinforce the meaning, such as *Head, Shoulders Knees, and Toes* or to add an element of humour as in *Alice the Camel*. But what is really important is that we select rhymes and songs that are of interest to the children and which, for obvious pedagogical reasons, adhere to the school official curriculum. We should always adhere to these basic principles before actually considering playing a rhyme and song in our classroom. Henceforth, there are a few questions we should firstly consider before actually playing the rhymes and songs in classroom: which the grammar of the song is, which songs work best with a specific age group, or whether the teacher needs to be musical, and what if children do not want to sing, according to Beall and Nipp (2002, pág. 329).

With regard to the first question, *the grammar or songs*, the language of songs may differ from Standard English in certain aspects since there is a poetic imperative involved here. Rhythm and rhyme can be more important than the correctness of form in songs. However, children are learning that language is used differently in different contexts and are already coping very well with this phenomenon in their mother tongue. It might be short-sighted then to discard songs because of concerns about the correctness of form. Songs may be useful for language learning even when the words are

complete nonsense as they may offer a fun way to practice the sounds and rhythm of the language and, hence, bolster confidence and fluency.

Considering the second question, *which song works best with a specific age group*, there are a number of important considerations when choosing songs for primary school children. Among them, we can mention that the lyrics must be immediately meaningful or simple enough so that the children can understand the song with a very little pre-teaching of the vocabulary of the expressions. Songs that involve a lot of repetition are easier to learn. The melodies should also be as simple as possible and repetitive in order to avoid any leaps in the pitch. The simpler the melody, the less important it will be to sing in tune. Simple rhythm and strong rhymes will also make the song easier to sing. For older children, rhymes and songs that talk about people or places usually stir their immediate curiosity. They also enjoy rhymes and songs about unlikely situations.

As far as the third question is considered, we have to consider whether *the teacher needs to be musical or not*. Due to our own personal and professional background, singing out in public may have become a challenging, when not a frustrating, task for us. On the other hand, there may also be some other teachers who feel comfortable at singing in class for either personal reasons or academic and professional training. However, regardless what our personal situation is, singing in class not only is a natural activity, since singing stimulates the students learning, but also can be used as a way of entertainment for pedagogical reasons. Therefore, the first necessary step for us to take is to feel ourselves confident with singing in class so as to show and pass this confidence on to our students. If you do not really want to sing, then it is worth considering chanting or rapping, which are good alternatives to singing. They involve a no less sophisticated range of melodic and rhythmic skills has now become a dominant form in popular music and the children may already have heard a great deal of it.

And finally, considering the last question, *what if children do not want to sing*, some children may be reluctant to sing. But the experience for them should be just as positive. Lots of smiles and encouraging nods from the teacher will help them feel relaxed enough to join in when they are ready.

A final criterion for choosing songs was provided by Curtain and Dahlberg (2004). According to them, any song should fulfil the following criteria:

1. The song should contain limited vocabulary.

2. The song should contain language compatible with that being used in the classroom.
3. The song should present a limited musical challenge.
4. The rhythm should be straightforward and repetitive.
5. Song topics should be within the experiences of children.
6. For primary level, it is useful if songs are accompanied by actions.
7. It is also helpful if the words of the songs are highly repetitive and if they have a refrain or a repeated stanza between the verses of the song. (Curtain and Dahlberg 2004, pág. 246)

Methodology for using rhymes and songs in the classroom

There are different ways and procedures for presenting a rhyme or song to our class. It all depends on the level of the class, the simplicity of the rhyme or song, and the time available. Rhymes and songs present a lot of linguistic material in a natural linguistic context. Words in rhymes and songs are meaningful to the learner, which influences the acquisition in a quite positive way. As Murphey assumes: “In general, they use simple conversational language with a lot of repetition” (1992a, pág. 7). Therefore, rhymes and songs stick in the learner’s mind and the words and expressions used are memorised more easily. Besides, rhymes and songs provide many possibilities for constant repetition and revising as important mechanisms of the language acquisition. Practising intonation through reciting rhymes and songs is mostly funny and very effective. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) suggest the following steps for presenting a song in class:

Step 1: prepare the students. Tell them what the song is about, preferably in English, making heavy use of visuals and gestures so they can get to know the song; play a recording or sing the entire song so that the students know what they are working toward. [...]

Step 2: go through the words. Make sure the children understand the words or, at least, that they understand the key words necessary for singing the song meaningfully and with enjoyment; place new vocabulary in context and illustrate the meaning with gestures and visuals; there should be very little new vocabulary in any new song, and the new words should be presented several days before you introduce the song. [...]

Step 3: speak the song line by line. Say the song one line at a time and have the children repeat the words; if the song is on the board, track the words with a pointer or a ruler. [...]

Step 4: sing a line at a time. Sing the song to the children one line at a time and have them sing it back; practice each line several times until the children can sing it independently and then practice it two lines at a time; finally put the entire song together. [...]

Step 5: add rhythmic accompaniments. Begin to add rhythmic accompaniment such as clapping, finger snapping, foot stamping or hand shuffling. (Curtain and Dahlberg 2004, pág. 265)

Guidelines for teaching rhymes and songs

The first necessary step in order to teach rhymes and songs is their actual presentation in class by means of any electronic device (CD, mp3 player or PC) in the case of a song or outspoken by the own teacher in the case of a rhyme. The teacher should previously have tested the devices prior to its use in class. Then, a double check is needed so as to assure that the students comprehend the nature of the activity and the content of the rhyme or song. It is not necessary to translate word by word but the students should know what the rhyme or song means and it is about. This step can also be supported by visual aids. Now the children can learn the text step by step. Longer texts can be learned verse by verse in the following lessons until the children can say the whole rhyme in chorus, in groups, or alone.

The order and the way of teaching songs are similar to the teaching of rhymes. At first, the song should be sung by the teacher or played from a CD once or twice while the students only listen to it. They begin to understand and to absorb the tune and the rhythm. During the next playing or singing, the children can clap the rhythm or hum the tone. Before learning the lyrics step by step, the teacher should check the understanding and explain the words the children did not understand. Then, they sing the song several times, at first supported by the teacher's voice, and later without the teacher's support. According to Griffée, "when rhymes or songs are introduced, the first skill that the children learn is listening" (1992, pág. 69). Activities which practice the skill of listening include detailed listening comprehension, listening for summarizing, listening to isolated vocabulary,

and listening for word order. And the second skill that children can learn is speaking. After the children listen to the song, they would attempt to sing it. After the children learn to listen and speak the words, it is the time for them to learn to write. Apart from writing down the lyrics, there are many ways to exploit songs for writing practice, such as a dictation or a cloze passage.

A suggested rhyme/song plan

One way to maximise the advantages of teaching songs and minimise some of the limitations may be to develop songs into language learning tasks. As stated by Cameron: “Although this alone will not help teachers develop a greater repertoire of songs, it can help turn a song into a useful tool for language learning” (2001, pág. 31).

Cameron provides hence a list of defining features of tasks for use in teaching foreign languages to children. For any activity to be considered a task, it must be carefully planned and structured with the learner participation.

Classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• have coherence and unity for learners• have meaning and purpose for learners• have clear language learning goals• have a beginning and an end• involve the learners actively

Figure 5. Requisites for classroom tasks (from Cameron 2001, pág. 31)

These features benefit the teacher because they provide a reference point when planning using a song. In addition to these five common features, Cameron reports that any song plan should have three stages: preparation, core activity and follow up activity. She argues that the preparation activities should help to prepare children to complete the core activity successfully. This might include pre-teaching of language items or activating topic vocabulary. The core activity is central to the language learning task, and without the core, the task would collapse. The follow-up stage then should build on the completion of the core activity (Cameron 2001, pág. 32). This classification was also considered by Millington (Millington 2011, pág. 138-139).

The first logical step is the *preparation stage*. At this stage, we should be clear about the focus of the activity itself, which is singing the song in a later step. Henceforth, prior to this, we should introduce the song with its

basic vocabulary and patterns so as students become familiar with them. Pictures, flashcards, cards, and drawings are quite useful for such purpose at this stage. Should we not have images or cards at our disposal, another interesting possibility is to ask students to prepare their own drawings or cards. No matter what means we make use of, the final aim of this initial step is to improve students' readiness to sing.

The second logical step should then be the *core stage*. In this one, once the task has been properly introduced and presented, we should elicit their interest and motivation for the activity by singing it aloud. It should be advisable, at this time, to carry along with the singing with a few times so students get used to the rhythm and pace of the song. A good practice is to vary the tone, volume and pace given in order to aware their interest.

Finally, the third and last step is the *follow-up stage* by which we put a correct end to the whole activity, reflecting on the learning process. Once the ludic part of the activity has been fulfilled, by repeatedly singing the song, it is now time for them to make a correct use of the limited vocabulary and patterns presented throughout the song. And there are quite a few choices at this step to keep on, depending on the teacher, the students or even the own task carried out: sentence completion, matching, rewriting in the case of written production skills, act-out, retelling in the case of the oral ones. But, whatever task we design, it should be suitable not only to the students' capabilities but also to the task that we have been carrying along.

Conclusions

When introducing small children to a foreign language, it is important to use materials that, on the one hand, capture their enthusiasm for learning, but also that offer them a cultural flavour of that country on the other. Rhymes and songs offer such a teaching resource. They provide a good insight into the English culture. The use of English names introduces children to English and its environment. The introduction of this cultural dimension allows us to develop vocabulary relating to these themes or topics whilst, at the same time, it provides a link to cross-curricular activities in other areas of the curriculum.

Rhymes and songs have been an amusing companion for human beings for as long as we can speak. As an integral part of our language experience, it can be of great value to foreign language teaching. And the many-faceted merits songs hold may enrich and activate our class.

Along the present article, we have dealt with the importance of rhymes and songs in the teaching of English, their functions, the criteria for selecting a chant to suit our classroom, and some procedures for presenting them to young learners.

Although it might be difficult to get our class used to the new songs, we will find that all children like them very much. We have to take advantage of this kind of love to enrich the language-teaching environment.

Rhymes and songs have an important function in teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools. Rhymes and songs combine important didactic claims with fun, activity, and motivation. Almost incidentally, the children become familiar with parts of the foreign culture and see them as enrichment for their own life.

According to the guidelines for teaching rhymes and songs and depending on the concrete situation, the teacher can vary the way of teaching these forms. It should not be forgotten to back up the basic vocabulary before introducing a rhyme or song, at least making sure that the content is understandable.

The English teacher can choose among a lot of types of songs and rhymes with special characteristics and actions. Each teacher should collect useful rhymes and songs on which he can always fall back.

We know, from our own personal and professional experience, that children love English songs and rhymes. All English teachers should foresee this big advantage of rhymes and songs and use them as a permanent part of their English lessons in classroom. We, as teachers, also enjoy singing, dancing and reciting with our children in class because it gives us the chance to influence the children's development in a positive way and to intensify the relationship to our children.

Since the nature of children is to play and have fun, it is possible for the teachers to teach them through the fun activity. And the use of rhymes and songs provides us with that powerful tool so as to fulfil our task properly.

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