Development of Music Videos for Students of Elementary-Level Japanese
-The Beneficial Pedagogical Effect of Using Songs with Images for Reinforcing Language Learning and Retention-

初級用ミュージックビデオの開発
- 言語習得における記憶強化: 歌とアニメーションの有益性 -

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I. Introduction

What makes us remember TV commercials so well? What are the components that cause successful commercial advertisements to be stored in our long-term memory? The commercials that stick in our heads include words, along with catchy tunes or well-known music, and visual materials for accompaniment. These elements, in particular music videos with highly repetitive songs, are also present in educational television programming aimed at children. What is it about music video clips that makes children remember them so well? What makes us, as adults, remember clips we saw in childhood? Educational video clips include elements similar to those of commercials, and their songs are even more repetitive. Through their utilization of various senses in combination, music and visual materials prove effective aids for memory in many different scenarios.

The use of songs as an effective and enjoyable way to learn a language, either native or foreign, has been recognized and proven as an important learning tool in research and practice for more than 70 years1, particularly in the field of teaching English as a second language. Many linguistic elements, such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, are easier to retain when encapsulated in songs via Murphey’s “the song-stuck-in-my-head-phenomenon” (1990, p. 58)2, especially if the music is catchy. This phenomenon supports the idea that songs can be a prompter for reinforcing short- and long-term memory (1990, as cited in Murphey, 1992).

The use of other senses, notably the visual and physical, in combination with the auditory can further accelerate the learning process (Rose & Malcolm, 1997). For example, when songs are integrated with contextualized visual images that enable students to picture the target linguistic components as if they were experiencing them (Ikegaya, 2010), the materials step up as “very powerful learning tools” (Lake, 2002, p. 6) when compared with rote learning.

That said, it is difficult to introduce unmodified, authentic songs at the beginning of language learning, since they are often not designed for true beginners or lack accompanying appropriate visual materials. Specifically, in addition to target vocabulary and grammar, an unmodified song also contains unknown vocabulary and new grammar that must be explained for students to understand the whole song. This difficulty might unnecessarily burden students and distract them from the target points. Furthermore, as the order of introduction of vocabulary and grammar varies depending on the textbooks of individual institutions, pre-existing original songs must be modified in order to fit the needs of the institution.

The songs developed in this project solve the problems outlined above as well as fill in the gap between elementary and subsequent levels so that students will be ready to move from understanding modified songs to grasping original ones. In addition, by adding visual aids and written questions to audio materials as well as in-class performances, students can engage multiple senses more fully for memory reinforcement. This paper will show how to create video clips and shares my experiences using them as homework assignments and classroom activities. Statistical results of pre-test and post-test scores are included for further support.


2 Described as “the echoing in our minds of the last song we heard after leaving a car, restaurant, etc. and which can be both enjoyable and sometimes unnerving.” (1990, as cited in Murphey, 1992)
II. Theoretical Background and Practical Use

II-1. Singing and Learning

Lozanov (1978) proved that music can play a powerful role in learning for students of all ages and of many subjects, through a method he calls Suggestology. In this method, music is considered one of the principal tools for inducing a receptive mental state, relaxed yet open to stimuli; it is this state which enables students to learn, absorb and retain the material more easily. Using Suggestology, Lozanov reported that students learn more in less time with less effort (as cited in Williams, 1983).

Along with music, songs are one of the most valuable resources for the development of students’ language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Saricoban & Metin, 2000). A variety of linguistic elements, such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm and the use of adjectives and adverbs, are incorporated in songs. For example, in order to acquire new vocabulary or grammar structures, a story song can be used along with pictures representing the target language elements; alternatively, a song with lyrics containing the target language elements can be sung (Medina, 2002).

Wallace (1994), based on results from her study, has supports the idea that the melody of a song can make a text more memorable when compared to simply hearing the text alone, provided the melody is easy to learn. She adds that a repetitive, simple melody serves as a recall aid, noting that when the music or melody is difficult to learn, recall is impaired rather than facilitated. Murphey (1992) also mentions that songs in general use simple, conversational language, with much repetition, making them more effective and more motivational than other types of speech.

Kind (1980) developed SingLing, a language learning technique now used worldwide. In Kind’s approach, familiar, universally known tunes are utilized with new lyrics to teach students. Students already know the melodies, so they feel comfortable, unburdened with learning new tunes; they can concentrate on and learn what they do not know, i.e., new lyrics that target the language elements we want to teach. This technique reinforces Williams’ (1983) suggestion that songs are effective and help in retention for memory when combined with simple tunes and familiar music.

Anton (1990), in the field of teaching Spanish as a second language, created original songs in Spanish based on his Contemporary Music Approach (CMA). According to CMA, students are introduced to the song, learn the lyrics and the music, perform the song from the memory, and finally write their own lyrics for the same melody. Anton further relates this approach to specifics of brain function, which will be addressed later.

In the field of teaching English as a second language, one of the most well-known materials that uses music is Jazz Chants by Graham (1978). Graham uses jazz for teaching the stress, rhythm and intonation patterns of English in an effective and fun way to improve students’ oral and aural comprehension skills, all while reinforcing the target structures for natural, everyday situations. Her Jazz Chants, which uses simple and repetitive music-based forms, demonstrate that a language can be learned using musical rhythms that parallel the natural rhythms of its spoken form.

All methods and techniques described above are applicable to Japanese as well, a language whose instruction as a foreign language has not been widely covered in the existing research. For example, as Graham demonstrated in her Jazz Chants and as many researchers have noted, songs help students learn words with the correct accent and pronunciation in a wide variety of languages including English, Spanish, German, and Chinese. One such example of a specific topic that can be taught successfully through a song, is that of sounds with very similar pronunciations. In Japanese, making distinctions among single consonant sounds, double consonant sounds, and long and short vowel sounds proves challenging for students. Kite (“coming”), kitte (“cutting”), and kiite (“listening”) are three different verbs in gerund forms (featuring the conjugational ending –te), and are difficult to distinguish for students. An appropriate melody and rhythm can help students listen to the right sound and pronounce it correctly. By changing the length of notes in a melody, we can teach the appropriate length and rhythm for words. For example, kite has two beats (ki-te), so two eighth notes can be used to indicate the word’s rhythm. Kitte has three beats with a pause in between the first and the last syllable (ki-i-te), which could be indicated in the same time signature by two eighth notes with an eighth rest in between. Although kiite also has three beats (ki-i-te),

3 See Kind 2003, a reprint of the original 1980 outline for this method.
the first two syllables constitute a long vowel4. Therefore, the combination of a quarter note and an eighth note can be used to express the word kite. Furthermore, since Japanese is a pitch-language, it is vital to know which sounds have a high pitch and which ones a low pitch, as different pitches produce different homonyms for a word spelled the same way in the hiragana syllabary. For instance, in standard Japanese the word ame means “rain” when the first (a) syllable is pitched high, whereas it means “candy” when the second (me) syllable is pitched high. In a song, such differences are easily sung with different notes—because after all, that is what music is all about. In Let’s Sing in Japanese by Yoshida (2006), which will be introduced in the following section, the original songs created by Yoshida were structured with correct pitches beautifully incorporated into each piece.

In addition to facilitating language skills, songs can be used to introduce cultural components to the students (Saricoban & Metin, 2000; Orlova, 2003). According to Saricoban and Metin, songs are culturally rich resources, providing new insights into the target culture and presenting cultural themes effectively. One linguistic example in Japanese that expresses Japan’s particular culture concerns the use of different terms when referring to a member of one’s own family versus someone else’s. When a person refers to his mother in a conversation with someone outside his family, he uses the humble form haha, but when a person refers to Ms. Toyota’s mother (as in the song that was created in this project; by implication the mother of anyone outside his family), he uses the respectful form okaasan (okaasan can also be used to reference one’s own mother directly or used among family members). This notion of inside and outside (in-group and out-group), as well as the values of humility and respectfulness towards others is thus woven into the lyrics.


In the field of teaching Japanese as a foreign language, two books have been published for using songs: Let’s Sing in Japanese by Yoshida (2006) and Learning Japanese from Songs by Terauchi and Sasaki (2001). Learning Japanese from Songs employs only unmodified songs (i.e., songs that have not been altered for the purpose of teaching Japanese). As stated earlier, those songs could be used starting from the latter half of the first semester or second semester of elementary Japanese students, but it is difficult to introduce them at the very beginning because, on top of the target vocabulary and grammar structures that each song is intended to teach, additional vocabulary and grammar structures must be introduced for students to understand and sing the song. Also, since the songs are all well known to Japanese but probably not to foreign students, the melodies of the songs must be learned in addition to linguistic components. Although the songs are a good way to introduce Japanese traditional tunes and incorporate Japanese culture, the timing of their introduction to students must be carefully considered in light of the difficulty, stemming from their unmodified nature, that early students of Japanese typically face.

Let’s Sing in Japanese by Yoshida (2006) has two sections: original songs created by Yoshida specifically for practicing Japanese, and unmodified “Japanese songs that everyone likes.” Yoshida acknowledges the idea that many authentic songs include difficult words or phrases that are not usually used. Therefore, she created her own songs with specific themes and important grammar structures, for the first section of her textbook. She also paid attention to intonation and accents, crafting melodies that are as close to those of speech as possible. Some of the songs integrate cultural components and expressions that are used in everyday life but are not necessarily taught in Japanese class. This book can be very useful, but again, new words other than the target words must be introduced to enjoy each song.

Several web sites using songs to teach Japanese can also be found, such as Songs That Teach Japanese by Bell (2001) or Sing in Japanese from Nihongo Side Street for Japanese-Language Teachers and Learners (updated 2006). When using some of these sites, making one’s own lyrics is encouraged, as Kind (2003) suggests. Through these publications and web sites, useful music, songs and lyrics can be found, but not many have pictures, animation or video clips to go along with the songs, elements that would produce more vivid and long-lasting memories, as suggested in section II-3.

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4 In Japanese, a long vowel occurs when the same vowel is pronounced twice in quick succession (one phoneme doubled), as opposed to changing the sound of the vowel from lax to tense, as in English.
II-3. Singing and Memory: Methods for Whole Brain Learning

“Your brain is like a sleeping giant” says Buzan in *Make the Most of Your Mind* (2001, as cited in Rose & Nicholl, 1997), and indeed the brain has great, unused potential. In order to have learners acquire what we intend to teach, it is essential to maximize the brain’s unrealized power by employing the function of the left and right hemispheres.

According to neuroscientific research, the left hemisphere of the brain specializes in specific, verbal and logic-based learning such as language and mathematical processes, logical thoughts, sequences and analysis – often labeled the “academic” aspects of learning (Rose & Nicholl, 1997, p. 33). In other words, the left side of the brain is engaged in expressing thoughts as concrete elements, such as words. The right hemisphere of the brain principally controls creative, non-verbal and/or emotional activities, including those utilizing rhyme, music, visual impressions, color and pictures, i.e., the “metaphorical mind” (Rose & Nicholl, 1997, p. 33; Blakeslee 1980).

In many classes, including traditional language classes, especially those at a college level, the left-brain thinkers dominate pedagogical approaches, as Blakeslee (1980) mentioned, and “most instruction relies heavily on left-brain approaches” (Guglielmino, 1986, pp. 20-21). Therefore, in order to make the most use of the brain, the right side of the brain must be activated. A song is one solution for bridging both hemispheres, strengthening retention through a complementary function. When we listen to the words of a song, the left hemisphere learns the words while the right hemisphere process the melody (Williams, 1983). In addition, the emotional/limbic system of the human brain will be engaged (Rose & Nicholl, 1997). In other words, listening and singing activates and involves the whole brain, and this “marriage of both hemispheres” of the brain results in establishing ideal conditions for learning (Blakeslee, 1980). This combinatory approach enhances long-term memory as well as makes mere rote memorization enjoyable, thus keeping students’ attention and interest (Williams, 1983).

In addition, many researchers point out that multisensory learning makes for the best learning. Garnett (2005) stated that the three principles to effective long-term memory recall are Visualization, Association, and Location. The materials to be memorized should be turned into pictures (Visualization), which in turn should have an association with something specific (Association). These images are then put into a sequence of a story or located in a place (Location). In addition, activities should utilize the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses for effective and long-lasting memory. Rose and Nicholl (1997) call it “the VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) attack strategy” (p. 104). In short, something is highly memorable if the materials become individualized, personal and meaningful to the learners.

In an analogous fashion, Ikegaya (2010) mentioned that if we make ‘knowledge’ more personal by association with individual experience, the memory can last tremendously longer. In other words, as Rose and Nicholl (1997) stated, “A memory associated with emotionally charged information gets seared into the brain” (p. 50); the more strongly the information is registered, the better and longer the memories become. This is demonstrated in mnemonic learning, where the more imagination-intensive the learning process is, the longer the memory lasts, and this result benefits from personal association. Ikegaya further adds that learning through the auditory sense is more effective than through vision alone. He concludes that maximizing employment of the five senses together is a short cut for learning.

Medina (1993) investigated the effects of music and extra-linguistic support (in the form of illustrations) on second-language vocabulary acquisition. The combination of music and illustrations yielded the highest average amount of vocabulary gain compared with the other three groups: a group with illustrations but no music, a group with music but no illustrations, and a group with neither. She concluded, “Clearly, illustrations boosted the effects of music” (p. 9).

These findings may not be surprising so much as they serve to highlight something essential about how we learn. “It’s no accident that when words are combined with music or with pictures, or when words are delivered with emotion, they are easier and faster to learn” (Rose & Nicholl, 1997, p. 35).

III. Project Goals

This project aims to develop music videos for students of elementary-level Japanese who have limited vocabulary and grammar. Even though it is obvious that the use of music is effective in learning a
language, there are various difficulties in effectively utilizing it as discussed above. The materials developed in this project resolve these difficulties and simultaneously fill in the gap between elementary and subsequent levels so that students will be ready to move from understanding modified songs to enjoying original (unmodified) ones. Even as they start to sing authentic songs, they can always go back to the songs that they made use of in the introductory levels when they try to recall vocabulary or grammar.

In order not to overburden students, unknown words were excluded in the songs where possible, and the themes, words, and structures were carefully chosen so that students can focus exclusively on the target language elements. In addition, the melodies were pitched as close to the tones of natural speech as possible, especially in the pronunciation song “Cut, Listen and Come.” For the most part, universally familiar melodies were chosen for this project, again to decrease any unnecessary burdens such as learning new melodies in addition to a new language. However, one authentic Japanese folk song was included to begin to introduce traditional Japanese tunes.

Accompanying video clips were also created in order to accelerate learning by stimulating the visual sense in addition to the auditory sense. Some clips were animated; some were designed to facilitate association with the items that students know; some introduced cultural information; and some were colored vividly because color is another key sensory input (Garnet, 2005). Written questions were added along with these video clips as an incentive to utilize the material.

IV. How the Music Videos Were Developed and Used

The programs and software used were iMovie, Band-in-a-Box, GarageBand, WavePad, Sibelius, Vocaloid, PowerPoint, and QuickTime. The procedure for creating music videos is as follows:

1. Create lyrics containing the target vocabulary or grammar structures, and make a presentation for them using PowerPoint or video
2. Find music along with the lyrics or compose an original tune (a background in music composition or help from someone with such may be necessary for those willing to compose their own music)
3. Input the tune’s notation and accompaniment using Sibelius and Band-in-a-Box

Example Melody Created with Sibelius
4. Record the vocals using a recording program or Vocaloid (a singing synthesizer application software which mimics a human voice)

Example Vocals Created with Vocaloid “Megurine Luka”

5. Put together the power point or video presentation, melody, accompaniment and vocals, and edit it in iMovie

6. Add subtitles for lyrics, full lyrics for answer video clips and lyrics with blank spaces for homework assignments. Add title screens

7. Convert the iMovie file into QuickTime (movie) format, so that it can be used online
Over three years, I have developed ten music videos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Songs</th>
<th>Language Elements Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>「本が一冊あります」 “There Is a Book”</td>
<td>Vocabulary: Classifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>「て-form song） “Gerund Form Song”</td>
<td>Grammar: Verb conjugation (gerund forms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>「メアリーの一週間」 “Mary’s Week”</td>
<td>Vocabulary: Days of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>「日付の歌） “Calendar Song”</td>
<td>Vocabulary: Months and dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>「家族の歌） “Family Song”</td>
<td>Vocabulary: Counting people and family terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>「切って、聞いて、来て） “Cut, Listen, Come -Verbs that Sound Similar-”</td>
<td>Pronunciation: Double consonants, long vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>「となりのおばけ」 “The Ghost Next Door”</td>
<td>Grammar: Transitive &amp; intransitive verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>「日本語が上手になりたい人は・・・!」 “If You Want to Master Japanese…!”</td>
<td>Grammar: Verb conjugation (direct consultative forms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>「体の歌） “The Body Parts Song”</td>
<td>Vocabulary: Parts of the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>「止まらなくちゃ！」 “The Rule of the Road”</td>
<td>Grammar: May, don’t have to, must, must not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These music videos can be used to introduce new structures, as homework assignments, or as review materials for enforcing new grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation. By downloading them, students can employ them at any place and time, and view and/or listen to them repeatedly to acquire the target linguistic elements. The videos can be shared with other teachers at the same level or even different class levels classes so that they can be used repeatedly as common materials.

In the past three years, we have used these video clips in our courses primarily as homework assignments or for introducing new grammar structures. When used as homework, students were assigned to watch a specific video clip and complete fill-in-the-blank and short-answer questions, and sometimes even make their own verses or lyrics to the same tune, using the target vocabulary and grammar. Whenever time allowed, the day after students completed the assignment we sang the song together as well as new verses created by students in class. Students had opportunities to watch the music video a few times, in order to finish the assignment as well as in class.

In the instructions for each assignment, the procedure to complete the assignment was clearly explained online. For example, the instructions for one music video uploaded on the course website are as follows.

1. **Listen** to and **sing** the song while **watching** the video clip a few times. **Write** the days of the week while listening in the same way you do dictation practice. **Using all 5 senses to the fullest will facilitate memory consolidation.**

2. Answer the following questions in English and Japanese.

V. Statistical Support

V-1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to report the data’s findings that support the idea that songs with images help students’ recall and retention. Research questions were:

1. Is there a significant increase in vocabulary recall (short-term memory) when the words were learned through the use of music videos as compared to those learned through the use of the textbook?
2. Is there a significant difference in vocabulary retention (long-term memory) between the group that watched the music videos and the one that did not watch the music videos?
V-2. Participants

The participants for this study were 45 students who were enrolled in an elementary level Japanese course at a private university in the northeastern United States during the fall of 2010. All students who had finished eight weeks of five-times-per-week, fifty-minute classes were presumed to be at a similarly low language-proficiency level, Novice-Mid on the ACTFL OPI scale.

V-3. Materials

The music video I developed for learning months and dates was used in this study. In order to test recall and retention of words, one multiple-question style pre-test and two post-tests in the same style were created. The ten targeted vocabulary words were selected for these tests. Since the purpose of this study is to measure the memory of the vocabulary, romaji, i.e., the Roman alphabet is provided next to hiragana, one of the two Japanese syllabaries, so that students did not need to spend time on decoding hiragana. The order of the questions was changed for each test, to prevent students from remembering the order of the questions rather than the correct answers.

V-4. Procedures

Two comparison groups were used: “the rote memory group” as a control group and “the music video group” as an experimental group. In order to determine the short-term and long-term effects of music videos, vocabulary acquisition (the dependent variable) was measured in the pre-test for the both groups on the same day prior to the experiment. Three days after the pre-test, the experimental group watched the video clip and then took the first post-test (post-test 1). The control group was allowed to look at the textbook for two minutes (approximately the same length of time as the song), and then took the first post-test. Three days after the first post-test, the second post-test (post-test 2) was administered to both groups. The class instructors administered the pre-test and both post-tests as part of regular class time in the same classroom environments on the same day for both groups (altogether taking up portions of six equivalent fifty-minute class periods).

V-5. Results, Implications and Further Research Suggestions

The amount of vocabulary acquired was determined by computing three vocabulary gain scores in the pre-test and the post-tests. In general, students answered approximately half of pre-test questions correctly as in Figure 1. For the pre-test, neither group received any memory reinforcements. Three days after the pre-test, students took the post-test 1, on which we notice a score increase of 36 points for the group without music videos and 38 points for the group with music videos. Three days after the post-test 1, students took the post-test 2, on which we notice a score increase of 3 points for the control group and 5 points for the experimental group.

![Figure 1. Average Test Scores](image)

After the removal of three outliers, we see that average pre-test scores are 6.1 points for students in the control group without music exposure, as in Figure 2. This suggests that random assignment of students to the control and experimental groups yielded two groups of students with different levels of
performance. However, after students in the weaker group (experimental group) were exposed to audio and visual reinforcement during the two periods before the post-tests, they improved more than did students in the control group, bringing the disparity in test scores down from 6.1 points to 4.6 points after the post-test 1 and to 2.0 points after the post-test 2. This revealed that the music video did help the weaker group (experimental group) learn more than the strong group (control group) and thus reduced the performance differential between the two groups.

**Figure 2. Disparity in Average Test Scores Between Groups**

For both groups, there is a much higher improvement rate between the pre-test and post-test 1 than between the post-test 1 to post-test 2. The differences between the improvement rates for the two periods are 90% for the control group and 104% for the experimental group. This phenomenon is primarily due to two reasons. First, students experience diminishing marginal returns to studying. They learn more towards the beginning than in later periods given similar periods of studying. The second reason is a technicality: an increase of 1 point in lower score ranges yield higher percentage increases than an increase of 1 point in higher score ranges (e.g. a 2 point increase from 2 to 4 is a 100% increase whereas a 2 point increase from 6 to 8 is a 25% increase).

Another important result is the fact that the experimental group improved more in both periods. As Figure 3 shows, during the period from the pre-test to the post-test 1, the experimental group had an improvement rate that was 20% higher than the control group. During the period from the post-test 1 to the post-test 2, the experimental group had an improvement rate that was 6% higher than the control group. This means that in the latter period, the improvement rate for students in the experimental group more than doubled those of their counterparts. Overall, the experimental group improved 35% more than the control group.

**Figure 3. Average Percentage Increase in Test Scores**

In summary, the music video contributed to improving the test scores of the experimental group (weaker group) by comparison to the control group (stronger group). In addition, it helped students in the experimental group recall more vocabulary than those in the control group, and also aided with retention of this vocabulary. As students were studying the materials during the class anyway, the possibility that some students acquired the target vocabulary merely through normal study habits cannot be denied. However,
the condition for both groups being the same, the experimental group still showed a higher improvement rate. This points to the success of the music video as a recall aid.

This study should be carried out with a larger sample size, and across more language levels. In this study, audio and visual materials were integrated to measure the acquisition of vocabulary, but the effectiveness of appealing to each sense individually, as well as other combinations of senses with music videos, should also be investigated. In addition, the broader application of music videos towards teaching other language skills, such as pronunciation, should be explored.

VI. Responses from Students, Implications, and Challenge

A general questionnaire was filled in by 210 students who were enrolled in an elementary level Japanese course at the same university in which the experiment above was conducted during the spring 2008, fall 2008, spring 2010, fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters. A more specific questionnaire was filled in by 84 students who were taking elementary Japanese at the same university during the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters. The results obtained indicate that the majority of the students reported positive feedback as seen in Figures 4 and 5: 94% said the music assignments are good (Excellent 53.3%, Good 40.5%); 84.1% said the music assignments were effective (Very effective 15.9%, Effective 68.3%); and 91% felt satisfied with the music assignments (Very satisfied 28.1%, Satisfied 62.9%).

Figure 4. Overall Assessment of Music Video Assignments

Figure 5. Effectiveness and Satisfaction of Music Video Assignments

5 The total amount of individual responses across multiple semesters.
6 The total amount of individual responses.
7 Responses on overall assessment of music assignments are from spring 2008, fall 2008, spring 2010, fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters. The other data are from fall 2010 and spring 2011 only because specific questions included in the questionnaires for fall 2010 and spring 2011 were added starting from fall 2010 semester.
The results for whether students perceived an improvement in their skills after using the music assignments are as follows (Figure 6): 52% thought that the music assignments helped them improve their memorization; 29% thought the assignments helped to improve listening skills; and 7% thought they helped to improve pronunciation. The other 12% thought that the music assigned improved various other factors, including cultural understanding (3 students), natural sounding speech (3 students), application to real situations (1 student), popular lingo (1 student), reading (1 student), songs easier to memorize than other assignments (1 student), speaking (1 student), speed of speaking (1 student), vocabulary application (1 student), writing (1 student).

Figure 6. Benefited Japanese Skill Areas (2010-2011 Academic Year)

As Figure 7 reveals, one interesting point is that in fall 2010, almost 60% of the students thought that the music videos were helpful for remembering words and grammar, and 21% of students cited them for improving for listening skills. However, in spring 2011, the percentage of the students who thought music videos helped with their memorization decreased to 44% and the percentage of the students who thought music videos are helpful for listening skills increased to 37%. This is because, I assume, in the fall semester of the elementary courses there are huge amounts of basic vocabulary that must be learned (such as numbers, months, days of the week, family terms and so forth) – indeed the songs were made for memorizing those vocabulary; therefore, students felt memorization was helped most by the music videos. However, in the spring semester, the sentences became longer and more complicated, and while those sentence structures still needed to be memorized, they first had to be heard and understood correctly. I speculate that students felt that the music videos helped them with their listening skills more due to the need for aural aids in understanding the more complex sentence structures.

Figure 7. Benefited Japanese Skill Areas (Fall and Spring Semesters)

As Figure 8 shows, regarding the question of what students liked most about the music assignments, 44% of the students found the music assignments fun/interesting/cute, and 29% educational (helped memorization of vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and practice for listening and speaking). 18% of the students mentioned in the questionnaire that “the songs were catchy,” of which 11% stated “the songs got stuck in my head” in mostly positive ways, but three students found this particular “stickiness” a negative. Positive feedback included comments such as, “when the songs were really catchy, they [were]
stuck in my head all the time, and helped [me] retain the grammar best so I could remember conjugations while doing homework and tests.”

After we sang the songs together in class, some students left the classroom singing the songs. This, as well as the positive feedback described above, indicates that Murphey’s “song-stuck-in-my-head-phenomenon” was occurring, and that the students were retaining the songs with the words we wanted them to learn. Furthermore, I heard some students singing the songs during tests while trying to recall the grammar rules.

According to the questionnaire, verb conjugation form songs (Te-form song, direct-consultative form song) were the most popular music videos among students with a positive impression of the project. One reason that these songs were popular, I presume, is that there were “make your own lyrics” or “karaoke” parts included with the songs as homework assignments. Some students commented that they liked making their own songs since it helped them remember the vocabulary more effectively. In fact, one student even recorded the songs and his own lyrics on his iPod and listened to them just like regular music while walking or jogging.

Figure 8. What did you like most about the music assignments?

In the comments section, some students said that they are so accustomed to learning just from a textbook that they do not think the songs particularly help them with memorization. Some already seemed to understand their own best learning styles and had established comfortable and effective ways to learn for themselves. For those people the music videos were merely amusement, and did not appear helpful for memorization.

Figure 9. What did you dislike most about the music assignments?

The purpose of using these music videos should have been explained in greater detail, and their usefulness reconfirmed in class. In the instructions to the assignments, the procedure was clearly explained, telling the students to use all five senses to maximize the memory process, but demonstrations of this in class before the assignments were lacking. In addition, songs need to be sung in class for yet more reinforcement. However, due to the curriculum schedule and intensive content of each lesson, the time that
can be spent on singing together during class is very limited. Some students commented that they wanted to sing the assigned songs more in class.

Yet, even when we tried to sing in class, some students were too shy to sing, especially during the 2010-2011 academic year. The atmosphere of the class (taking individual students’ personalities into account) must provide a good singing mood. A class with students who are willing to sing and enjoy themselves seems to achieve reasonable success, while a class with students who are reluctant to sing might not achieve its goals. The affective filter that goes up around puberty is difficult to lower in adult second-language acquisition (Krashen, 1985), especially with something like singing for which some people do not always have self-confidence, particularly in group settings. While it is certainly challenging, it is possible to overcome the students’ initial reluctance to sing through encouragement, explaining the importance of singing to enhance one’s memory and creating a comfortable atmosphere in which students feel less self-conscious. Overall, the students in the 2010-2011 academic year did not seem as energetic about singing in class compared with the students in the prior academic years. In fact, it was the students from previous years whose enjoyment of singing inspired me to make more music videos this academic year. As Figure 4 shows, the ratio of the students who said the music assignments were “excellent” was greater than that of the students who said music assignments were just “good” in spring 2008, fall 2008, and spring 2010 spring, compared to those in fall 2011 and spring 2011. This reveals the students from spring 2008, fall 2008, and spring 2010 spring might have been enjoying the music more, in turn leading to greater achievement through their use.

Some students commented that the songs were repetitive in both positive and negative ways. Students with positive feedback further added that the repetition helped them memorize the materials. On the questionnaires from the academic year 2010-2011, three students said that certain songs were childish. Many students said that they would have liked to sing “real” songs, but when they were introduced, they complained that the music was too fast and the songs difficult to understand. The music videos developed in this project aimed to bridge to the next stage of language ability, where students can learn to sing unmodified songs more easily. Some students ask for more educational songs and some ask for contemporary songs; it is difficult to satisfy each student, so one contemporary unmodified song was introduced in fall 2010, and three in spring 2011 in order to practice the target structures. In spring 2011, the order of introducing educational and contemporary music videos were carefully considered and spread evenly throughout the schedule. The final unmodified song was assigned as one of the final homework assignments to sing together in the last class, so that students could build confidence in singing a “real” song with their knowledge, and prepare to step up to the next level.

In this project I created vocals using two Vocaloids (a type of software which mimics a human voice), my own voice and occasionally my young son’s voice, to provide a variety of voices. Several students mentioned that they preferred my voice to that of the Vocaloid programs, commenting that it was clear and fun to hear. Even though I am not a professional singer and am in fact not skilled in singing at all, my voice is familiar to the students and that fact may have made them more comfortable. I sang as clearly as possible while paying attention to pronunciations that are difficult to distinguish, as well as to intonations that are as close to those of speech as possible. Professional singers emote more in their singing, which sometimes results in producing over-aspirated sounds or pronouncing sounds that are not commonly used in colloquial speech. It would be interesting to perform further research on the effectiveness of a professional singer’s voice versus a familiar if unskilled voice.

In addition, it is important to know the best timing for presenting any given music video. Some music videos were presented at the right time (at the moment of introduction of particular concepts of grammar), but some were presented slightly later than intended due to having still been under construction. The songs introduced after their target lesson could not be used as introductory materials, but still made for

8 “Ashita ga aru sa (There is tomorrow)” by Ulfuls (2001) was introduced for practice of direct-style verbs in fall. The following three songs were used in spring: “Purezento (Present)” by Jitterin Jinn (1990) for practice of sentence modifier and give-receive verbs; “Benkyoo no uta (Study Song)” by Chiato Moritaka (1991) for practice of giving advice and the ‘hazu’ structure; “Sakura (Cherry blossoms)” by Funky Monkey Babys (2009) for the summary of the spring semester.

9 The survey was conducted to ask which song among the songs that I chose students want to sing as the final assignment. As a result, “Sakura (Cherry Blossoms)” by Funky Monkey Babys (2009) was chosen as the final assignment song.
good review materials. Yet, while students found them helpful when reviewing, it would have been better if we had been able to use some of the songs to introduce new concepts, and as homework assignments to provide students with fresh and memorable images of the new material. This problem will be solved next year, as all current music videos are complete and ready for use.

Incorporating more cultural components in music videos is another measure I would like to see furthered. It is possible to include such components in lyrics, but using traditional Japanese folk melodies may be more difficult as most of them are often slow and are not too “catchy” by pop music standards. They could be still used occasionally, however, or adjusted to have more upbeat tempos.

VII. Conclusions

It is always important for language teachers to provide students with the best learning environment and tools that fit students’ needs, but given that students have their own learning styles, it is also our job to teach via all possible means so that students can choose which methods work best for themselves. Music videos are one of these means. Individuals’ unique learning styles imply that music videos may serve as activators for right-brain thinkers who are otherwise left out of much of the “academic” learning process, and function as triggers for left-brain-oriented students to utilize more right-brain functions. Overall, this increase in total brain functionality will improve recall and memory, and moreover, the relaxing nature of songs (and the unusual form of these assignments) can be a break from everyday routine work. Students enjoy these music video assignments — an important motivation for studying, as many students commented in the questionnaire. As Murphey noted, “most importantly, perhaps, songs are relaxing. They provide variety and fun, and encourage harmony within oneself and within a group. Little wonder they are important tools in sustaining cultures, religions, patriotism, and yes, even revolutions” (1992, p. 8).

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References

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Appendix 1

Pre-test (Two post-tests in the same style were created. The order of the questions was changed for each test.)

Pre-Test: Calendar Months and Dates

Section ______ Name_________________ /10

Choose the correct Japanese equivalent for the following words. Roomazi is also provided to help you.

1. April
   a. よんがつ (yon-gatu)
   b. よがつ (yo-gatu)
   c. しがつ (si-gatu)
   d. しちがつ (siti-gatu)

2. July
   a. なんがつ (nan-gatu)
   b. いちがつ (iti-gatu)
   c. しがつ (si-gatu)
   d. しちがつ (siti-gatu)

3. September
   a. くがつ (ku-gatu)
   b. くうがつ (kuu-gatu)
   c. ろくがつ (roku-gatu)
   d. きゅうがつ (kyuu-gatu)

4. The first
   a. ついたち (tuitati)
   b. いちにち (iti-niti)
   c. ひとか (hito-ka)
   d. いちか (iti-ka)

5. The fourth
   a. ようか (yoo-ka)
   b. よっか (yok-ka)
   c. よんか (yon-ka)
   d. ゆか (yo-ka)

6. The eighth
   a. ようか (yoo-ka)
   b. よっか (yok-ka)
   c. よんか (yon-ka)
   d. はちか (hachi-ka)

7. The third
   a. さんか (san-ka)
   b. むいか (mui-ka)
   c. みか (mi-ka)
   d. みっか (mik-ka)

8. The sixth
   a. ろっか (rok-ka)
   b. むいか (mui-ka)
   c. みか (mi-ka)
   d. みっか (mik-ka)

9. The fifth
   a. ごか (go-ka)
   b. いっか (ik-ka)
   c. いちは (iti-ka)
   d. いつか (iti-ka)

10. The seventh
    a. ななか (nana-ka)
    b. なか (naka-ka)
    c. しちか (siti-ka)
    d. いつか (iti-ka)
Appendix 2
Questionnaire for the music video assignments (2010-2011 Academic Year)

Evaluation for Music Videos

We invite your responses and comments about the music video assignments. Your suggestions and recommendations provide us with opportunities for improvement, and contribute to the evaluation of the assignments’ effectiveness. Please circle your responses and make specific comments. Thank you for your cooperation!!

1-1. What is your overall assessment of the assignments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1-2. Please select how you feel about the assignments on the following scales:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Not Really Effective</th>
<th>Not Effective At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Really Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Satisfied At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too Short</th>
<th>Just Right</th>
<th>Too Long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Frequent Enough</th>
<th>Just Right</th>
<th>Too frequent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1-3. How important do you think this kind of assignment is to the development of your Japanese skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Less Important</th>
<th>Not Important At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1-4. Did the music videos help you to learn grammar and/or vocabulary?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not Really</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1-5. How often did you make use of the music videos to learn grammar and/or vocabulary in addition to complete the assignments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>More Than Once</th>
<th>Just For Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What did you like and dislike most about the assignments?

Like:

Dislike:

3-1. How are the assignments effective? (In what Japanese skill-areas do you think these assignments helped you?)

3-2. If you think they were not effective, what suggestions do you have for improving the assignments?

4. How often would you like to have this kind of recording assignment in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More often</th>
<th>Just Right</th>
<th>Less often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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