

GRAMMAR, WORD, LEXIS: CLINES OF LANGUAGE IN POPULAR SONGS

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ABSTRACT

Popular songs can have great music and simple lyrics or great lyrics with unspectacular music. Sometimes, however, there is more to a pop song than first meets the ear. Systematic and attentive listening in a wide variety of genres of popular music reveals a number of songs that have music and lyrics of equally high quality. The lyrics of these well-crafted popular songs usually pattern out in three basic ways. First, lyrics can feature dazzling displays of predominantly grammatical patterns. In such songs, the choice of lexical patterns and individual words recedes before the choice of grammatical structures. Second, lyrics can feature a highly selective choice of words. A word list or a dense clustering of a particular part of speech stands out against a background of repetitive grammatical or lexical forms. Third, song lyrics may feature a greater emphasis on lexical patterns; grammatical structures and individual word choices are entailed in the larger phrase and sentence patterns. The lyrics to well-crafted popular songs can thus be laid out on a cline of grammar – word – lexis, with an overwhelmingly emphasis on grammatical forms at one end, a preponderance of lexical patterns at the other, and a heightened attention to the choice of individual words in the middle. Since English songwriters are speakers of the language and their lyrics participate in the general system of English, such a cline shows that grammar, word, and lexis are inseparable and interdependent. Grammar cannot be taught at the expense of lexis or vocabulary, since even the most grammatical of songs will entail some lexical patterning and grammatical forms that will influence the choice of specific words. Nor can lexis be taught at the expense of grammar and vocabulary, since lexis entails the choice of both grammatical form and individual words. In the same way, new words cannot be taught in isolation from the grammatical structures and lexical patterns in which they occur. The increased awareness of the interdependent qualities of English provided by popular songs ensures a more balanced presentation of the language in the classroom. Carefully chosen, well-crafted songs provide compelling supplemental documentation of course book language from the world beyond the book, e.g., patterns of grammatical use, patterns of word use, lexical patterns and their uses,

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narrative and conversational discourse templates, and the socio-cultural concerns of the society in which the song was written. In addition, such songs provide a thematic tie-in to each lesson that is both esthetically pleasing and viscerally engaging. Music can induce a positive response to English that course books often do not. This paper details the process of finding those songs that are equally rich in music and language from initial audition to final compilation, demonstrates how songs pattern out along the language cline, and shows how to present song lyrics in a way that preserves this more complete, interdependent view of grammar, word, and lexis.

Key Words: popular music, language pedagogy, teacher language awareness

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES

Though music has been a staple of the language classroom for many years, its power to increase learner language awareness remains underdeveloped. Murphey (1992) uses the affective power of vocal and instrumental music as a classroom management technique and in numerous activities that concentrate mainly on the learning and use of individual words and the production of sentences. Cullen (1998) and Machado Castro Cunha (2010) use popular music as a basis for traditional classroom discussions of song content. Saricobin and Metin (2000) and Medina (2000b) reinforce the teaching of traditional grammar points with song-based exercises. The most common use of music in the classroom is to use songs to teach vocabulary, usually as single-word items or phrasal verbs (Kent, 1999; Lieb, 2008; Medina, 2000a, 2002, 2003; Upendran, 2001). Lieb (2008) and Medina (2002) also provide insightful discussions of the power of music to lower student affective filters, which makes them more receptive to new language. Cullen (1999) uses songs for traditional dictation exercises and notes the close relation between the melody and rhythm of songs and the natural rhythms of spoken English. In all of these activities, learners are called upon to process, manipulate, or reproduce the language in the lyrics within a traditional view of English as a system of grammatical rules and an open-ended list of vocabulary items.

Learning to produce formally accurate sentences is insufficient for successful language learning; one must also learn how sentences are used for communicative effect (Widdowson, 1978). In addition, knowing what a word means includes knowing something about the other words it is used with and how they go together (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, &

Finegan, 1999; Lewis, 1993; Nattinger, 1988). This requires learners to work with language above and below the level of the sentence (Lewis, 1993). Cranmer and Laroy (1992) have developed a number of activities that use purely instrumental music from the Western classical tradition to stimulate students to develop ‘mental images’ in response to the music. These mental images and their affective resonance provide the personal material and motivation for activities that increase self-awareness and awareness of the environment. Little attention, however, is paid to language awareness. Suggestopedia (Cranmer & Laroy, 1992; Murphey, 1992; Stevick 1980, 1998) has gone furthest in recognizing the affective power of music and the efficacy with which its appeal can activate previously unused reserves of energy and enthusiasm for learning. Suggestopedia, however, relies solely on instrumental music drawn from the Western classical tradition.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the role of popular songs in sensitizing learners to the patterns of grammar, word, and lexis that occur in the lyrics of a small minority of finely crafted popular songs. Musical candidates are chosen for their linguistic content, their musical appeal, and their thematic relevance to topical content of course book lessons. The lyrics are formatted in a way that is sensitive to the phrasing they were given in the recorded performance. Intonation is an important contributor to the meaning created in discourse (McCarthy, 1988). The singer’s phrasing provides a useful guideline for deciding which language information should be deleted for the gaps. As a result, learners will need to attend to word pairs, phrases, and clause structures. Discourse-sensitize cloze procedure is useful for drawing learner attention to the substance of the language. As Carter (1988) observes, “Cloze is not a perfect replica of the language-making process by any means; but ... comes close to aligning with natural processing abilities, especially when used in a discourse-sensitive way” (Carter, 1988, p. 177).

Well-crafted popular songs have a powerful positive effect on language learners who have come to their university English classes with a well-honed set of defenses and ambivalence toward further study of the language. Stevick (1998) describes the learning fatigue that can easily be observed in any language classroom:

In a language class, then, many of the student’s resources, and much of his energy and attention, will be used up—or tied up—in defending himself from whatever is causing the “psychic tension.” From this

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tension and from the student's efforts to deal with it, there may come not only inferior learning but also psychosomatic disorders: drowsiness, headaches, digestive discomfort, and the like. (pp. 232-233)

The affective power of music functions to engage learners on a visceral level which cuts through negative affect and engages them afresh with the language. Learners are involved with the music on a physical level and their positive affect follows.

PATSY AND THE CLINES

There is a lot of great music with simplistic and even inane lyrics. There are some great lyrics with innocuous, saccharine, or even terrible music. There are some songs where both the words and the music are eminently forgettable. And there are a small number of songs that are as linguistically compelling as they are musically appealing. Murphey (1992) observes, "Although usually simple, some songs can be quite complex syntactically, lexically, and poetically ... and can be analysed in the same way as any other literary sample" (pp. 7-8). Linguistic features usually associated with literary language are also a staple of everyday discourse (Carter, 2004).

The lyrics in that significant minority of songs pattern out in strikingly different ways. There are songs with an overwhelming emphasis on grammatical forms. There are other songs with an obvious emphasis on the choice of individual words. And there are songs that feature a preponderance of lexical expressions. These three patterns can be plotted along a cline or continuum, with grammar at one end and lexis (understood as lexical expressions) at the other. Words occupy a position midway between the two extremes (see Figure 1).

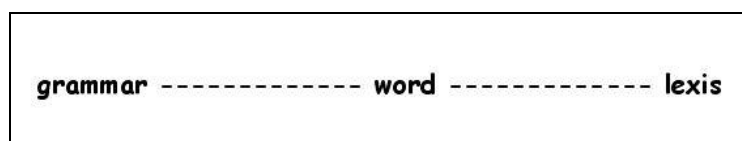


Figure 1. The cline of grammar, word, and lexis

A cline is a spectrum or a continuum. It assumes relationship and

continuity rather than dichotomy or opposition. On this cline, *grammar* includes the choice and patterning of grammatical forms – all the stuff of English grammar books and course books from the elementary level on up. *Word* includes the choice and patterning of individual words and groups of words. *Lexis* includes the choice and patterning of institutional expressions, the appropriation of this institutional language by the songwriter(s) who invest it with their personal meanings, and the production of novel lexical expressions based on a breaking of familiar conventional patterns. Such pattern making and pattern breaking is a hallmark of quotidian linguistic creativity, or, as Carter (2004) describes it, the art of ordinary language.

The relationship between grammar, word, and lexis is interdependent (Biber et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Lewis, 1993; McCarthy, 1988; Sinclair & Renouf, 1988; Widdowson, 1978). Language is discourse which entails lexis. Lexis in turn entails specific grammatical forms and the choice of specific words. As Lewis (1993) observes, “Language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar” (p. vi). In other words, language is learned and used as a repertoire of largely pre-fabricated pieces or chunks of language. Language users string these chunks together with their knowledge of the discourse conventions of that language; they select individual content words from existential sets of words that are linked pragmatically and linguistically to the topic and the situation (Biber et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Lewis, 1993; Nattinger, 1988; Widdowson, 1978). The choices made from these sets of words get their coherence from their relation to context or situation, and their cohesion from their relationship to other language being used in that situation, or co-text (Lewis, 1993; Carter & McCarthy, 1988).

With this kind of lexical approach to the new intake language contained in the course book, it soon becomes apparent that there is very little grammar per se that needs to be taught. Likewise, there is very little vocabulary (understood as single words) that needs to be taught. Instead, learners will be required to turn their attention to the patterning of sentences, phrases, and words.

MY FAVORITE THINGS

Purchasing budget-price compilations of the greatest hits of a specific artist, a particular genre, or from a specific time period (the 90s, the 80s, and so on) is a sound investment. Compilations bring together in one place

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a lot of music that might otherwise require some time and effort to locate and acquire. In addition, CD compilations provide a quick overview of an individual artist's work.

It sometimes happens that a number of songs on a compilation that are especially suitable for use in the classroom come from the same original LP or CD release. It is worth investigating the album on which those tracks were originally released. The compilation CD liner notes will provide the information about the original release and any previous CD releases that is needed to locate the original album. Chances are there will be other songs on that album suitable for use in the classroom.

Information on specific music genres or artist compilations is readily available at general reference websites like Wikipedia and at dedicated websites like AllMusicGuide.com. Additional information can be conveniently accessed through their external links.

WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK

The process of song selection is subconscious and visceral. Audition new songs while consciously occupied with some task. Being consciously occupied allows your ears to recognize – and your body to react to – songs that you will want to consider using in the classroom. You want your ear to respond. You want your body to respond. The importance of a gut-level response will become clear when you use the songs in the classroom.

Let your ear be drawn and your body swayed. Make a note of the song title, the name of the CD, and the track number. Then, whenever it's convenient, check the lyrics with a more careful second, third, and even fourth listening. If you still have doubts about the lyrics, download them and read through them to make sure the linguistic resources you thought were there actually are there.

After you've compiled a list of candidate songs, go back and listen to what caught your ear or made you react physically the first time. Of course, the language comes first, since we are teaching English and not music appreciation. Musical excitement is a bonus and is usually found in the rhythm section, but riffs, hooks, and melodies can also be memorable as can the entire arrangement and the overall expressiveness of the performance.

As you refine your musical and linguistic sensitivity during the course of extensive song auditioning, you will find that it is the rare song that is

both lyrically and musically well-crafted. And that is why you want to use them. They will engage your students on a visceral level at the same time that they provide them with a meaningful opportunity to become more sensitive to the language they are studying. In addition, visceral engagement provides a source of pleasure during the course of a long, often boring school day. Such engagement instantly dissipates a lot of negative affect, boredom, and other cognitive dissonance.

THE RIGHT WORDS FOR THE JOB

Lyrics can be downloaded from any number of online lyrics sites. Downloading lyrics saves the time and trouble that would otherwise be required to type them up from the CD liner notes. When you download lyrics, specify the artist's name after the song title. Famous tunes have usually been covered by any number of artists, so you have to make sure you download the lyrics that match the performance you want to use. Specifying the artist's name after the song title ensures that you get the right lyrics for the job. This sounds like a small matter, but it is easy to get the lyrics for some other performance and they will not match the recording you are using.

Whether they are taken from an online source or from a CD booklet, the lyrics must be checked against the recording. Published lyrics from any source are usually full of typos. In addition, performers often make their own editorial changes. The lyrics as performed will therefore often be different from the lyrics as originally published.

If the lyrics are not available online or printed in the CD liner notes, you will have to transcribe them yourself. In the case of exemplary songs, this is worth doing. Lyrics may be indecipherable in some spots, or a specific word unclear due to the articulation of the singer or because of the recording technology used at the time the recording was made. In such cases, you can use software like SlowGold (available from www.jazzbooks.com or www.musicdispatch.com) to slow down the speed of the recording without changing the pitch. Using good quality headphones also makes it easier to transcribe those trouble spots.

BODY AND SOUL

In this section I briefly outline the chief points of linguistic interest in

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the three songs used to illustrate the interdependence between grammar, word, and lexis. “Predictions” (Vega, 1990, track 9) shows the interdependence between grammatical form and individual words. “Friday on My Mind” (Young & Vanda, 1966, side A) demonstrates the interdependence between individual words, collocation, and lexical phrases. “Maggie May” (Stewart & Quittenton, 1971, side 2, band 2) is an example of how generic, institutionalized language (reporting structures, the language of blame) shapes discourse by the sentence frames within which situation-specific language is instantiated as word pairs, collocations, and phrases.

How much of this wealth of linguistic detail should be discussed in class? At the very least, learner attention should be drawn to the most obvious or pervasive features of the song. “Predictions” (Vega, 1990, track 9), for example, is based on the formation of the passive voice and has a dazzling variety of words and phrases. “Friday on My Mind” (Young & Vanda, 1966, side A) begins with a list of the days of the work week; the description of each day entails various lexical expressions related to work and builds up a psychological profile of the work week. And “Maggie May” (Stewart & Quittenton, 1971, side 2, band 2) has a lot of language devoted to the reporting of feelings and the making of recriminations. The song recasts a few romantic clichés as well. Just how far one goes beyond stating the basic and the obvious is a function of pedagogical aim, class level, and the overall responsiveness to the music of the students in that class.

TO GRAMMAR’S HOUSE WE GO

“Predictions” (Vega, 1990, track 9) is a deceptively simple song with an obvious emphasis on grammar and individual words and phrases:

*Let’s tell the future.
Let’s see how it’s been done.
By numbers. By mirrors. By water.
By dots made at random on paper.*

*By salt. By dice.
By meal. By mice.
By dough of cakes.
By sacrificial fire.*

*By fountains. By fishes.
Writing in ashes.
Birds. Herbs.
Smoke from the altar.*

*A suspended ring or the mode of laughing
Pebbles drawn from a heap
One of these things
Will tell you something.*

The title of the tune creates the expectation that we will hear what the predictions were and who made the predictions. Instead, we get a compendious list of how they were done. The basic grammatical trope is the formation of the present perfect passive. The use of the passive allows for the specification of the agent with *by*. The identification of the agent in turn requires a name for the agent. Instead, Vega substitutes another use of *by* – the identification of the means by which something was done – for the expected use of *by* to identify the agent of the action in a passive formation (Swan, 1995).

The choice of a grammatical form and its repetition in a litany of means create the conditions for a list of words to be generated. But not just any list. We hear a dazzling list of words and phrases organized by rhyme, rhythm, reason, and assonance. The potentially bewildering randomness of word referents is tempered and given cohesion by the organization of the list of words and phrases based on their syllables, their rhyme, and their rhythm in relation to each other and to the music.

The increasing use of ellipsis (the deletion of *it's been done* after line 2; the deletion of *by* in the third and fourth verses) shifts the listener's attention away from the grammatical form and the subtle conceit of seeing the future as something which *has been* done. The unexpected conceptual shift goes with the grammatical sleight of hand with *by*.

“Predictions” shows the interdependent relationship between grammar and words: a specific grammatical form can constrain or even determine the choice of the words that are used with it (Biber et al, 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Lewis, 1993). A grammatical category – the means by which something has been done as indicated by the use of *by* – provides the pretext for the listing of the means by which people divine and have divined the future. “Predictions” also shows the intimate

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relationship between the rhythms of spoken English and of music. So close is the fit between words and music that it is difficult to say if the words and phrases shaped the music or if the music influenced the selection of words and phrases.

IN THE BEGINNING ...

“Friday on My Mind” (Young & Vanda, 1966, side A) opens with a list of names familiar to every student of English – the names of the days of the week:

*Monday morning feels so bad
Ev'rybody seems to nag me
Come in Tuesday I feel better
Even my old man looks good
Wednesday just don't go
Thursday goes too slow
I've got Friday on my mind*

The names of the weekdays are pragmatically redefined as the five days of the workweek. Each day name is the scaffold for a psychological description of how each day unfolds for the anonymous protagonist. These descriptions entail specific collocations and lexical expressions related to work (*Monday morning, ev'rybody* [at work], [I] *come in* [to work]), and it is these items which help redefine the names of the weekdays as the five days of the work week. Note the ellipsis at work in some of these expressions.

The lexical expressions further entail a small set of emotionally loaded words (*feel, nag, bad, good, better*) and a set of pragmatically potent words (*so, even, just, too*). What emerges is a psychological profile of the work week. In addition to its dense linguistic patterning, “Friday on My Mind” serves the time-honored pedagogical function of providing information about the culture in which it was written (Cranmer & Leroy, 1992; Murphey, 1992). The dense emotive patterning that emerges from the choice of words and the use of work-related collocations and lexical expressions informs the thumbnail experiential sketches of each day of the work week.

The last line of the first verse features the slick substitution of *Friday* for *something* in the generic expression *I've got something on my mind*.

Through this substitution, the general and indefinite (*something*) is made personal and specific (*Friday*). It is a symbolically subversive move: the language of seriousness and pre-occupation is used to speak of frivolity and diversion on the weekend as a rejection of the tedium of work, a rebellion subservient to pleasure.

“Friday on My Mind” shows the interdependence between word choices and lexical expressions on the one hand, and affect and pragmatic or cultural knowledge on the other.

LEXIS: BOLD AS LOVE

“Maggie May” (Stewart & Quittenton, 1971, side 2, band 2) features the prominent use of lexical expressions, reformulations of clichés, and the language of recrimination:

*Wake up Maggie I think I got something to say to you
It's late September and I really should be back at school
I know I keep you amused but I feel I'm being used
Oh Maggie I couldn't have tried any more*

*You led me away from home just to save you from being alone
You stole my heart and that's what really hurt*

The generic reporting structures include: *I think, I got something to say to you, I really should be, I know, I feel*. The cliché *I can't go on anymore* is restated as *I couldn't have tried anymore*. The chorus features the use of the sentence pattern *You [did something] just to [purpose]*. This is the sort of ting people say in arguments when they want to blame someone for something.

The use of *couldn't have* in lieu of *can't* is pragmatically significant, as it shows that the relationship between the protagonist and Maggie is already over and has been over for quite some time. This is an example of the subordination of grammatical form to pragmatic concern (Lewis, 1993). The *Wake up* that begins the song is an example of a specific type of deictic locution that Nattinger (1988) calls “the language of social control” (p. 77).

“Maggie May” also makes use of emotionally loaded sets of words and phrases (*school, home; heart, hurt; amused, used; led me away from, save you from, stole*). The emotional power of these connotatively laden

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words is aided and abetted by sound relations: consonance (*heart, hurt*) and rhyme (*amused, used*). Despite their sonic resemblance, these words are situationally (pragmatically) redefined as value-laden opposites: *heart* is good, positive; *hurt* is bad, negative. Someone who is being *used* usually doesn't feel *amused*. The closeness in sound belies the romantic distance between Maggie and the protagonist.

"Maggie May" is an instance of the interdependence between lexical expressions and word choices.

START ME UP

It is necessary to distinguish between the use of cloze procedure as used here from the traditional use of this procedure. Traditional cloze procedure all too often violates the learners' experience of language because the gaps are chosen mechanically or randomly (every fourth word, every seventh word, etc.) and with an obsessive concern for individual words, be they specific parts of speech or new vocabulary. Language use is neither random nor arbitrary (Widdowson, 1978). What the traditional use of the cloze procedure misses entirely is that new words are typically used in certain phrase or sentence patterns and may co-occur with certain grammatical forms (Biber et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 1988; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Lewis, 1993; Nattinger, 1988). The traditional uses of cloze are associated with testing for vocabulary development (Carter, 1988).

As used here, cloze procedure is designed to sensitize learners to language as discourse and to point out the interdependent relationship between grammatical forms, words, and lexical patterns. In addition, learners are encouraged to develop a more holistic approach to finding answers than traditional cloze procedure materials would require (cf. Carter, 1988). Instead of filling in blanks that have been more or less arbitrarily or even randomly chosen, learners are encouraged to use, and guided in the use of, a more holistic experience of the language in which they use anything and everything they know about the language to find the answers. The traditional focus on individual words and grammatical forms constrains the knowledge and the thought processes a learner needs to find answers, thus constricting and narrowing their experience of the language.

The purpose of a more holistic use of cloze procedure is not to test learners on language that has been studied, or to teach them new language,

but to sensitize them to the language in the songs so they can bring this new awareness of the language back to the course book, which contains the relevant intake language. The sensitivity and awareness learners develop in their language class will ideally be transferred to their experiences with the language as encountered in English-language course books in non-language classes and in their lives outside the classroom. The use of songs as described below is therefore relevant to learners at all levels (Carter, 1988; Lewis, 1993; Murphey, 1992).

The placement of the gaps coincides with the phrasing of the language has been given by the performer. The gaps, and the language information they prompt the learner to supply, are consistent with the learner's experience of language as something whole and natural (Carter, 1988; Lewis, 1993; Sinclair & Renouf, 1988). This includes their experience of L1 as well as L2 as experienced through the consumption of the language as used in the mass media.

Songs can be formatted as shown in Figure 2. How you gap the songs depends on your purpose. Is it for in-class handout for a particular course book lesson or as a listening, reading, writing, and reasoning component on a test? In the latter case, the number of points you want it to count for determines the number of gaps you put in. The relative degree of difficulty can be regulated by changing the language that is required by a particular gap. The degree of difficulty can be further controlled by changing the number of answers in each answer bank. Having one answer bank for the whole song is obviously the most difficult, but sometimes one answer bank for each verse makes things too easy. A balance is required: not too challenging so as to overwhelm or discourage people and not so easy that it requires little or no effort to find the answers.

Different lyrics will suggest different approaches to gapping. Some lyrics may be more overtly lexical, e.g., "Maggie May," while others are more overtly grammatical, e.g., "Predictions." Here I have chosen to leave the sentence frames largely intact and focus instead on the content language which is typically a phrase or clause structure (see Figure 2).

There are two ways to find the answers, direct and indirect. The direct way happens when students understand enough of the lyrics to just go ahead and fill in the correct answers. This is unlikely to be the case for many of them, however. In any event, little or no learning will take place because, by definition, learning is an encounter with the unknown. If something is known, it needn't be learned. Indirect means will be necessary for the majority of the students who won't understand enough

of the lyrics to just fill in the blanks.

Pop Lexis: Rod Stewart's "Maggie May"

Write the letter of the correct answer in each blank. Your knowledge of English grammar, your ear, and your common sense will help you find the answers. Finally, check with the recording.

a. keep you amused	b. stole my heart	c. back at school
d. save you	e. Wake up, Maggie	f. I'm being used
g. really hurts	h. to say to you	i. I couldn't have tried
j. led me away from home	k. It's late September	

1) _____, I think I got something 2) _____. [0:14]
3) _____ and I really should be 4) _____.
I know I 5) _____, but I feel 6) _____.
Oh Maggie, 7) _____ any more.
You 8) _____ just to 9) _____ from being alone.
You 10) _____ and that's what 11) _____.

a. a pain I can do without	b. shows your age	c. stole my soul
d. worry me none	e. The morning sun	f. you didn't need to coax
g. in your face	h. you're everything	i. all of your jokes

1) _____, when it's 2) _____, really 3) _____. [0:59]
But that don't 4) _____, in my eyes 5) _____.
I laughed at 6) _____, my love 7) _____.
Oh, Maggie,
You
You 8) _____ and that's 9) _____.

Figure 2. "Maggie May" (first half) classroom handout

Indirect means include:

a) Turning the blank into a *Wh-* question using the language before and after the blank to reframe the search for answers: the fresh perspective allows learners to make new connections to their search for answers and this can stimulate them to use language knowledge that hadn't been using prior to reading the question and considering it.

b) Prompting the students to ask themselves *what kind* of word (which part of speech) goes in the blank, i.e., is the first word of the answer a noun, a verb (and if so, which form is the verb in), and so on.

- c) Directing the students' attention to collocations: which answer has a word that goes with the other word that appears immediately before the blank?
- d) Directing the students' attention to lexical expressions: looking at the word immediately before and after the blank, which answer forms an expression (a phrase or a clause) that you recognize?
- e) Capitalization: written English sentences conventionally begin with a capital letter; song lyrics typically begin the first word in each line with a capital letter; so the answer to a blank that appears first in a line must begin with a capital letter; punctuation (punctuation is used to set off grammatically significant parts of a sentence; Carter & McCarthy, 2006);
- f) Rhyme: popular songs in most, if not all, genres frequently make use of rhyme; the answer for blanks that appear at the end of a line can be found simply by looking for a final word in an answer that rhymes with the last word in the line before or after it, or by looking for a pair of answers where the final words rhyme. Rhyme requires a learner to voice the word mentally and to relate what they hear in their mind's ear with what they hear on the recording during playback;
- g) A feel for the language: what *feels* right, in terms of the rhythm between what appears in the blank and the language that comes immediately before and after it? What *sounds* right?
- h) The process of elimination: learners are reminded that, if they can't figure something out during the first pass through a verse, just leave it; when most or all of the other answers have been found, whatever is left over goes in the remaining empty blank(s). The process of elimination can give students who feel overwhelmed a basis for developing the confidence begin developing their skill using other indirect means; they are less likely to give in to their feeling of helplessness and shut down completely;
- i) Holistic, relational thinking: after choosing your answers, go back and cross-check your choices. For example, does this choice answer the question (cf. a)? Is it the correct part of speech (cf. b)? Does my dictionary show this word to be the collocation or part of the lexical expression I think it is (cf. c, d)? Does the answer begin with a capital letter if the first word in the answer is the first word of a line (e)? Does the last word of the answer in fact rhyme with the last word of the line before or after it (or is there a word in the answer that rhymes with another word in the same line

(cf. f)? Does the answer feel right in terms of sound and rhythm (g)?

The last item, cross-checking, is the most important step and the one that most learners are least likely to do. It sounds obvious but all too often the first step – plugging an answer into the blank – is the last step. Learners must be reminded to think about their answers by going through this checklist of cross-references. The more items they use the cross-check their answers, the more fully they will engage themselves emotionally and intellectually in the task of finding the answers. The development of emotional and intellectual resilience is the goal here.

More learning can take place when learners use indirect means because they are using more of themselves and more of the language to find the answers. As Nattinger (1988) observes, "... the more we actively work out a solution to a problem (the more commitment we make to the task of learning something that is), then the more likely we are of storing this information permanently" (p. 65). From this point of view, knowing the answers directly is commendable, but not as useful or productive as learning how to find the answers through any combination of indirect means. It is not necessary to understand all of the language that is there in order to deal with it successfully (Lewis, 1993). The ability to deal successfully with the unknown without understanding everything is an invaluable life skill, especially when it is transferred from language learning to other areas of life experience.

The songs are not intake language – the course book has plenty of that – but instead serve the more important purpose of documenting for students the use of language elements from the course book as they have been used "out there in there world," which is where students will be asked to function with the language after they graduate and look for jobs or else go to graduate school locally or abroad. Even while they are still here, they may be asked to take classes taught in English or use English-language textbooks in classes taught in L1.

After eliciting answers for each verse of the song and showing them on the in-class projector in the file containing the song that has been specially prepared for just this purpose, the recording can be played twice so they can check their answers and enjoy the music. After proceeding in this way through the whole song, the recording can be played straight through one last time so learners have a chance to see how the whole things hangs together lyrically and musically. They can also enjoy the music. Esthetic pleasure, which is often visceral pleasure, deserves a larger role in the classroom.

Depending on the accuracy of the answers given during elicitation, relevant feedback on the discovery process can be given. The point here is for learners to refine their analytical and reasoning skills, which they will then bring back to the course book.

AND THE DIFFERENCE IS YOU

Songs provide compelling documentation of course book contents from the world beyond the book, e.g., patterns of grammatical use; patterns of word use; patterns of lexical use. Well-crafted songs document the socio-cultural concerns of the society in which the song was written and in which the song was well-enough received to become a hit or to otherwise garner fame for the artist. This is relevant to language sensitization, since so much of the actual language people use is shaped by cultural concerns and pragmatic conventions, rather than being a matter of merely grammar and vocabulary. Songs provide a viscerally pleasing thematic tie-in to each lesson. Music often induces a positive response to language that language alone (i.e., a course book) cannot. Finally, an appropriately cloze-gapped song can be used to evaluate skills in reading, listening, grammar, analytical and problem-solving abilities, and instill the essential life skill of being able to deal with the incomplete and the unknown.

So what difference does any of this make?

... maybe the difference is between those who strive to teach more language and teach it better within the expectations of our existing society, and those who dream of developing themselves personally and professionally so that they can accept and meet the challenge of helping their students to achieve their full human potential and thus to lift society itself to a higher level. ... (Stevick, 1998, p. 161)

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