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USING SONGS TO TEACH AURAL COMPREHENSION IN THE INTERMEDIATE-ADVANCED FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Introduction

The foreign language classroom is an artificial linguistic environment where the student is usually exposed to structured and simplified input in small doses. The result is often a considerable deficiency in aural comprehension even beyond the beginner level. A number of authors have pointed out that language learners sometimes become more competent at speaking than at understanding native spoken discourse (e.g., Wipf, p. 345). A student can be understood by a native speaker in spite of mistakes and other distortions, whereas the reverse is often not the case. The student is much more in control of the communicative process as a speaker, since he or she has the chance to concentrate on what needs to be formulated, select those linguistic forms which are available and produce a message in which he or she has sufficient confidence. As a listener, however, the student is at the mercy of the native speaker's articulation patterns, choice of colloquial or more formal constructions, rate of speech, careful or careless syntax and other potentially problematic features of natural discourse.

In fact, as Belasco (p. 19) has found, even some language teachers are better at producing than comprehending speech when exposed to authentic input. Nord (pp. 70-1) points out that some of this is attributable to audiolingualism where listening comprehension was stressed less than the capacity for self-expression. As is well known, Krashen's Input Hypothesis reflects the opposite approach where "the ability to produce language is based primarily on comprehensible input, i.e., listening comprehension and read-

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ing" (Krashen et al., p. 262; also cf. Krashen, 1982, p. 60). The idea that comprehensible input is $i+1$, i.e., input at a level only slightly above the student's current competence (Krashen et al., p. 264), suggests that the emphasis on listening comprehension exercises, especially for less advanced students, should be carefully controlled so that the student is not overwhelmed. This is especially important when *authentic* materials are presented in foreign language instruction.

The use of authentic materials is a widely accepted practice (Ciccone, p. 203) and constitutes an important element in breaking down the artificiality of the foreign language classroom. As Ciccone points out, "the lack of early exposure to anything other than contrived speech increases students' later frustration and retards their acquisition of the language" (p. 204). The question is how to situate Krashen's notion of $i+1$ in connection with authentic materials presented to students beyond the beginner level. How far can the learner's limits of knowledge be pushed before comprehensible input becomes incomprehensible? It is noteworthy that Leow (p. 84, p. 87) has found that the simplification of aural input does not necessarily facilitate comprehension for adult learners especially at the more advanced levels.

Therefore, when authentic (unsimplified) materials are used for listening comprehension in the third- or fourth-year classroom, Ciccone's notion of *limiting the universe of possible meanings* should be taken into account: "[...] when [students] are shown how to situate the particular authentic input in its context and thus limit the universe of possible meanings, they report greater satisfaction and make better progress" (p. 204). The broader the universe of possible meanings, the more difficult is the task of decoding the input and transforming it into intake. There are many methods that can help the student to limit the universe of possible meanings during listening comprehension exercises. What many authors appear to agree on in this connection is expressed by Lund (p. 13) who points out that the key issue in the use of authentic materials in aural comprehension work is not so much their intrinsic level of difficulty as the kind of *task* that a student must perform in response to this input (cf. Dunkel p. 103 and Leemann Guthrie p. 38). This would imply that Krashen's notion of comprehensible

input, as it relates to the use of authentic listening materials, can become more flexible than it may appear.

In this article, we will present an aural comprehension development technique for intermediate-advanced students of Russian which aims at expanding comprehensible input through the use of song-poems. We will argue that learning can be enhanced by expanding Krashen's notion of $i+1$ to $i+1,2,3,4...$. We will discuss how the prosodic and poetic structures of song lyrics make this type of input particularly effective in the second or foreign language classroom. We will also examine the merits of this approach from the standpoint of motivating students, reducing their classroom anxiety, and encouraging the use of effective language learning strategies. Finally, we illustrate in detail the application of this method in the first author's Russian language textbook based on the songs of Bulat Okudzhava.

Expanding Input

The main premise of our approach is that as long as the students are given sufficient support in the task associated with listening comprehension, they can decode authentic materials that might otherwise appear to be considerably above their current level of competence. However, in order for such an ability to emerge as an acquired skill, the listening comprehension exercises in question must become more than just a minor component of a comprehensive language course. As Belasco argues, "in order to understand spoken language at an effective level, it is absolutely essential for one *to be trained* to listen at that effective level" (p. 18). In other words, understanding native speech with all of its distortions and "noise" can be taught if it becomes the focus of intensive classroom work.

In this connection the theoretical framework of this technique is provided by the notion of *focal skills* (Hastings, p. 31). The focal skill approach involves the isolation of a given skill, such as listening or reading comprehension, and thorough exercises aimed at developing it. The materials used for focal skill development constitute a module (Hastings, pp. 34-5), and we will propose an aural comprehension module below. Hastings (pp. 32, 37) points out that this approach leads to the development of emergent skills,

i.e., improvements in skills which are not the direct focus of a given module. Thus, an aural comprehension module can lead to improvements in the student's speaking ability, which is in line with the main tenet of the Input Hypothesis.

Listening to Okudzhava

The first author has been working on this method for the past seven years and has applied it to teaching French and Russian at the intermediate-advanced level in the university setting. In 1996 he published a textbook entitled *Listening to Okudzhava: Twenty-Three Aural Comprehension Exercises in Russian*. The input material in this book consists of songs by Bulat Okudzhava which are featured on an accompanying CD.

Okudzhava's songs are part of what A. Tumanov calls popular Russian ballads, a musical-poetic genre which emerged in the former Soviet Union after Stalin's death (1990, p. 30). A. Tumanov points out that the songs of such authors as Okudzhava were a response to the pompous art officially approved by the Soviet system and used by it for propaganda purposes. Initially these popular ballads were disseminated on home-made tape recordings or performed privately in small circles: "The new bards were talking not about the masses, but about individual men and women, about their inner, non-collective world in which the individual was the center" (A. Tumanov, 1990, p. 31). A. Tumanov (1990, p. 31) points out that thanks to their brevity, their precise language and their wealth of idiomatic materials, Russian popular ballads are perfectly suited as authentic material for foreign language instruction. What is more, A. Tumanov isolates Okudzhava as particularly appropriate, thanks to his clear enunciation and articulation, his judicious balance of colloquial and more formal language, his variety of themes, and especially the high poetic quality of his lyrics.

Music and Language Learning

Before proceeding to a discussion of the proposed methodology, we want to consider a number of theoretical and pedagogical aspects of poetic-musical materials with respect to foreign

language instruction and learning. As many authors have pointed out, songs evoke a positive emotional response that enhances the student's learning experience in a general way. To quote James, "the music, the voice of the singer, the rhythm and phrasing of the song, and so on, will normally help make the text come alive in a way that simply reading it, silently or aloud, will not accomplish" (p. 132). Richard-Amato points to the anxiety-reducing effect of songs (p. 116; also cf. A. Tumanov, 1986, p. 35). And indeed, like the music that enlivens a party, songs in the foreign language classroom create an atmosphere associated not with the stress of mental effort, testing and public scrutiny so typical of the classroom setting, but with recreational activities.

Such a reduction in classroom anxiety, while desirable in its own right, can also contribute to more effective learning. Studies which use causal modeling techniques to examine the role of affective factors in second language learning (cf. Gardner et al., Gardner and Tennant, MacIntyre and Gardner), tend to show a significant correlation between language class anxiety and achievement. The anxiety associated with the learning and use of another language is considered to be a type of affective condition that is distinct from other types of anxiety which students experience in educational settings. Indeed, students in the language classroom not only experience communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, but they also find themselves in a situation where their "self-concept as a competent communicator" is challenged (Horwitz et al., pp. 127-128). In addition, one of the reasons why language classroom anxiety tends to be a debilitating factor in language learning is that, in Krashen's terms, it contributes to the affective filter which hinders the learner's receptivity to input.

Listening to music is generally considered to be a pleasurable activity. Associating such an activity with the learning process would therefore appear to us to have the potential to increase students' motivation. Although we do not know of any empirical studies which demonstrate conclusively the effects of music-based teaching materials on language learners' motivation levels, the first author's experience, echoed by that of Jolly (p. 13), indicates that students are very enthusiastic about song exercises. They view them as the diametrical opposite of the dry drills associated with

more traditional approaches. Gardner (pp. 10-11) defines motivation in language learning as being composed of the following elements: a goal (learning the language), a desire to attain the goal, effortful behavior toward reaching the goal, and favorable attitudes toward learning the language. This last affective component (attitudes) is generally measured in the empirical research of Gardner and his colleagues in terms of attitudes toward the learning situation, which is composed of attitudes toward the instructor and attitudes toward the course. A course that makes use of musical material has the potential of increasing students' motivation in this way by creating positive affect. The positive effects of motivation on achievement are not only intuitively obvious, but are also clearly demonstrated by a substantial body of empirical research (see Gardner and Gardner et al. for reviews).

Furthermore, music appears to be a linguistic vehicle that facilitates intake better than spoken poetry. With respect to memory, music appears to play a special role. Everyday experience indicates that melodies tend to "stick" to us: often in spite of ourselves. After only brief exposure to a given tune, we can start humming it, sometimes quite mechanically. Even when no specific melody is present, music tends to be retained in memory. Call has discovered that musical tone sequences were retained better than sequences of unconnected words: "Clearly the skill tapped by the tonal memory subtest has a greater relationship to listening comprehension than was hypothesized" (Call, p. 776). The implication of the foregoing is that music can act as a facilitator of comprehension and retention of linguistic input during aural comprehension exercises.

When music is combined with poetry, a symbiotic relationship is established between them with respect to retention. Unlike ordinary speech, songs allow whole chunks of language to be acquired by the student (Richard-Amato, p. 112). This is attributable to musical phrasing and structure, among other things. A. Tumanov's analysis of Okudzhava's songs demonstrates several important points in this connection. Firstly, the poetic text is normally primary, i.e., the structure of the music depends on the structure of the lyrics:

In vocal music semantically tied to language, grouping and metrical structures cannot exist without the verbal text. This text inevitably

affects the segmentation in the grouping structure, as well as the rhythm-metrical patterns of a particular segment. When segmentation occurs in a passage, the composer cannot ignore the verbal text which [...] is constructed either as word-combinations or sentences (A. Tumanov, 1986. p. 36).

Given our above-mentioned tendency to retain musical segments and in light of the way music reflects the structure of the text, the learner is more likely to remember a text carried by a melody than one presented on its own. To confirm this, all one has to do is try to simply recite the lyrics of a familiar song. The result is not likely to be very impressive. However, as soon as we try to sing the same words, we find it much easier to reconstruct them. Thus, the melody appears to function as a mnemonic device.

Furthermore, as A. Tumanov's analysis suggests, repetition plays an important role in musically-mediated linguistic intake: "[The key] features of poetry are rhyme, rhythm and intonation; their fundamental correspondence with music appears in the principle of artistic repetition typical of both arts" (A. Tumanov, 1990, p. 47; also cf. p. 59). This is a simple case of "practice makes perfect": because songs are naturally repetitive, the learner is more exposed to a given linguistic element, which facilitates the transition of intake from short- to long-term memory (Brown, p. 400). The refrain is probably the best example of this phenomenon.

As for the comprehension or decoding of linguistic input, carefully structured and well-articulated songs can also offer an important advantage over spoken discourse. As A. Tumanov suggests, in a song words and phrases are stretched out and broken down in accordance with the laws of musical composition:

Even a relatively fast tempo allows more time for the articulation of a verbal passage in vocal music than in oral speech. [...] While pronouncing a consonant in a sequence our articulatory organs are already anticipating the pronunciation of the next vowel (or consonant), thus erasing the strict boundaries between the two. Such complexity is even more far-reaching if one takes into consideration that we normally pronounce not separate sounds, but whole syllables and words as articulatory units. All these processes are slower in vocal speech than in oral, a fact which might be employed in language pedagogy (1986, p. 50).

This implies that the singer is bound by a certain form, i.e., the meter of the song directs pronunciation in such a way that linguistic distortions can be minimized. Of course, there are songs where distortion does take place, e.g., prominent percussion or a certain "loose" style of enunciation by the singer can contribute to this. However, carefully selected songs, such as those of Okudzhava (accompanied only by guitar), can provide the student with truly accessible authentic input.

Furthermore, comprehension can be facilitated by emotional coloring in the music (Brown, p. 30). Given the primacy of the lyrics with respect to music, the meaning of the text can dictate a certain tone to the vocal performance. This tone, conveyed by such elements as intonation and tempo, can confirm or invalidate the hypotheses that a student is advancing as to the denotation of the lyrics.

Poetry and Language Learning

Okudzhava's lyrics constitute very carefully constructed poetry with rich rhyming schemes and other prosodic elements. This played an important role in the decision to use his songs as authentic input for listening comprehension. For pedagogical purposes, the poetic aspects of the linguistic material in songs are at least as important as the musical presentation. Lotman argues that poetic discourse is fundamentally different from non-poetic discourse. Poetry is what Lotman (p. 117) calls "connected" discourse:

“Ни одна из частей поэтического текста не может быть понята без определения ее функции. Сама по себе она просто не существует—все свои качества, свои качества, свою определенность она получает в соотношении (сравнении и противопоставлении) с другими частями”.
(Lotman, p. 82).

The special relationship between elements in poetic discourse is attributable to parallelisms:

Параллелизм представляет собой двучлен, в котором одна его часть познается через вторую, которая выступает в отношении первой как модель: она не тождественна ей, и не отделена от нее. Она находится в состоянии аналогии — имеет общие черты, именно те, которые выделяются познания в первом члене (Lotman, p. 87).

The elements in a binary unit entertain a special relationship that goes beyond mere syntax. They echo each other in a way that no two words can in a string of non-poetic discourse.

For a student the relationship between poetic elements established through parallelisms, such as rhyme, can act as comprehension cues. To quote Lotman,

"рифма—повтор. Как уже неоднократно отмечалось в науке, рифма возвращает читателя к предшествующему тексту. Причем надо подчеркнуть. Что подобное возвращение оживляет в создании не только созвучие, но и значение первого из рифмующихся слов " (p. 71).

This recursive principle (Lotman, p. 63) means that a student listening to poetic lyrics may initially have trouble decoding a given element but can be helped in this task by its binary counterpart.

In this connection it is noteworthy to also consider the rhythm of poetry. Just as in music (see above), poetic rhythm segments the text into meaningful units and creates cycles of repetition which also establish parallelisms (Lotman, pp. 65, 110). Thus, syllables and phrases that correspond to each other according to a poem's prosodic structure evoke each other. This also leads to the realization of Lotman's recursive principle, and during listening comprehension exercises binary rhythmic units can act as an additional support for the decoding of input. In fact, as Underwood (p. 6) suggests, the recursive principle can work in conjunction with its opposite: prediction. Thus, the first element in a binary unit can sometimes help the listener to anticipate what is coming up next in a slot determined by the prosodic structure of the text. All of this means that if a student is presented with paraphrased poetry, any given element is encountered in prosodic isolation. The contextual semantic and syntactic cues available to the listener in this situation are not supplemented by the paradigmatic relationships of poetry.

Language Learning Strategies

By focusing students' attention in an intensive way on deciphering a text, this approach has the potential, in our view, to stimulate and encourage the students' use of strategic learning practices, which could be extended to other learning tasks in the foreign language classroom. In the past decade, as cognitive approaches to studying second language acquisition have gained wide acceptance, researchers have focused a considerable amount of attention on the role of language learning strategies (cf. Oxford, O'Malley and Chamot, Vandergrift, 1995, Vandergrift, 1998).

Oxford divides language learning strategies into two broad categories: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies are classified as metacognitive, affective and social. The decoding of song-poems involves the use of some indirect strategies. As we have already shown, students can apply the affective strategy of lowering one's anxiety through an appreciation of the pleasurable aspects of these musical texts. It can also be argued that the systematic approach which underlies the *Listening to Okudzava* method can assist in developing metacognitive awareness by encouraging learners to reflect on the listening process, prepare themselves for each stage of the listening task, and evaluate their own comprehension. Vandergrift (1998) demonstrates in fact that one of the factors differentiating good learners from weaker learners in aural comprehension is their degree of metacognitive awareness. Good learners understand what they have to do to succeed and focus their efforts accordingly. The method described here can contribute to developing effective ways of learning in the domain of Oxford's direct learning strategies as well. The mnemonic link which we have already discussed between music, prosody and text in song-poems, as well as the frequent repetition of the song, enable students to apply effective memory strategies. By intensively focusing students' attention on the text, this approach also encourages the use of cognitive strategies. The comprehension exercises in *Listening to Okudzava* (described in the next section) require students to analyze the text and create a structure to aid in deciphering it. Compensation strategies, which involve making intelligent guesses, also play an

important role in this approach to aural comprehension. The structural and contextual cues provided by the rhythm and rhyme of the text, as well as the cues provided by the comprehension exercises, give students what they need to compensate for gaps in their linguistic knowledge and thereby to decipher the lyrics. In fact, Ciccone's notion of limiting the universe of possible meanings can be viewed, from the perspective of the learner's own activity in a listening comprehension task, as the effective application of cognitive and compensation strategies.

Decoding Songs Using *Listening to Okudzhava*

Earlier we referred to the importance of assigning tasks to students in response to authentic input. This is especially relevant to the use of songs in the classroom. Ur (p. 65) has found that passive listening to songs in the classroom produces poor results. She even argues that in such a situation the musical presentation of linguistic material takes the student's attention away from the lyrics. The question is what kind of tasks can turn the unfruitful experience described by Ur into a productive listening comprehension exercise. With respect to this we would like to turn to Tosti's notion of "vigilance tasking" which is the "continuous matching of the auditory stimulus with the written form" (cited in Nord, p. 84). We believe that as a general principle, vigilance tasking is the most appropriate approach to the use of songs in the foreign language classroom. The printed text must be presented in a way that will maximize the student's active response to the song. However, as the following will demonstrate, it is not merely an issue of handing out the lyrics of a given song.

Here is a step-by-step description of a listening comprehension exercise based on the proposed technique (see Appendix for a sample lesson):

1. The students listen to a recording of a song once all the way through without any text to look at. This conveys the general emotional tone of the song and presents the overall outline of the musical and linguistic material.

2. The students are asked to open their (Russian-English) dictionaries.

3. The students are presented two printed versions of the lyrics on two different pages. Version A consists of blanks for all but the most common words (articles, pronouns, some conjunctions etc.). The undeleted words help to establish word boundaries, which is very important because students of foreign languages often have the problem of hearing word combinations as continuous units. Each letter in a missing word is represented by a subtext dash. Version B differs from Version A only in that the former retains some of the letters in a given missing word. The decision to retain a letter is motivated by its importance in the decoding process. Each word is identified in parentheses as a part of speech, which helps the student to reduce its syntactic and semantic range and situate its function in the sentence. Without this comprehension aid the decoding process would be more difficult and lengthy. Since this method is aimed at intermediate-advanced students, it is assumed that they are more or less familiar with the parts of speech.

The need for two versions has to do with the fact that in most language classes there is a variety of levels among the students. The instructor should recommend that the more advanced or confident students use Version A, while the others work with Version B. However, since both versions are made available to everyone, if an advanced student is having a particularly difficult time with a given element, he or she can always turn to the appropriate place in Version B and then return to Version A. In this manner the amount of stress or anxiety possibly associated with such decoding exercises is reduced. We have found that even the weakest students in an intermediate language class can perform very well with Version B.

If a given word is repeated in a song, in each subsequent occurrence of this word more and more letters should be provided. This is aimed at less advanced students who are first given a chance to perform at the highest level but are then guided to their own level by hints.

4. The instructor begins to play the song, but this time pausing for two or three minutes between segments (lines or sentences). During each pause the students use their dictionaries to find each missing word and write it into the blanks. They are encouraged to ask for the segment in question to be repeated if necessary. The dictionary search, as well as the repetition, focus the student's attention on a given element very intensively. Various false assumptions regarding what has just been heard are tested during this process, rejected and tested again, until the most plausible version is found and transcribed in the spaces provided. The division of each blank word into letter-blanks helps to confirm the correctness of a given transcription and to guide the student in the dictionary search. Armed with all of the above-mentioned cues, and given the time and effort required to decode each element, the student has a considerable amount of intensive exposure to the material in the song.

Most students do not require more than about three minutes per segment. However, those who do not finish transcribing the entire segment in the allotted time can still accomplish a certain amount of partial decoding. This too is beneficial in light of the subsequent exercise. For a song of average length the entire transcription process should take from half to a whole class hour, which means that on occasion step 5 will take place when the class meets again.

5. Once the song has been transcribed, the instructor goes back to the beginning. This is the oral processing stage of the exercise. The song is played in the same manner as before, i.e., segment by segment, and each time students take turns accomplishing two tasks *out loud*: a) reconstructing the original segment and b) translating it into English. In those cases where incorrect or partial decoding has taken place, the instructor does not simply give the missing information to the student. Instead, hints should guide the learner to the right answer, and the segment in question should be played again. Here one should rely on the prosodic structure of the lyrics. If a student has managed to grasp one member of a binary pair, the instructor can point out that the two words rhyme, i.e., the ending of the first element should *predict* the ending of the second. Thus, yet again the student is made to dwell on each problem element. In this manner even if the instructor eventually runs out of

hints and finds it necessary to ask someone else to help the stumped student, the element in question is more likely to be retained thanks to the sheer amount of effort and attention devoted to its reconstruction.

It is very important to note that no mark should be given for in-class performance during the reconstruction-translation stage. unkel argues that in general "response tasks should be success-oriented and should focus on training not on testing listening comprehension" (p. 104; cf. Underwood, p. 26). The students should never feel any kind of additional stress in this already demanding situation. Otherwise, some learners might freeze up and perform at a level that is significantly below their normal competency.

6. The students are presented with the complete lyrics of the song on a separate page and have them before their eyes while they listen to the song all the way through for the third time. If we consider how many times the students have heard the song in different ways by this time (including all the repeated segments), we can appreciate the likelihood that this material will be assimilated. At this point the instructor might suggest that the whole class sing the song along with the recording.

7. The instructor asks the students questions in the target language in order to test their comprehension of the song as a whole. These questions can include interpretative issues, simple facts (who, what, where, how and why) and extratextual points, such as allusions or sociopolitical contexts. It is recommended that the questions be prepared in advance and provided in written form underneath the complete lyrics. In this manner the students can more easily understand what is being asked, since the questions will include much of the new lexical material from the song.

8. The instructor asks one student to memorize the song and recite (or sing?) it at the beginning of the next class. We have found that students have no trouble doing this, and perform this task willingly.

9. In order to make sure that the new material has been fully assimilated the instructor assigns take-home translation exercises

based on the song. The students translate *into Russian*. These exercises consist of sentences which include as much of the new linguistic material as possible. Elements taken from the song should be in boldface. These translations are to be handed in for marks, and the students must be told that they will be penalized for not using material from the song to translate items in boldface. Until this was made a requirement, some students would often turn to the dictionary and find a synonym that would translate a given element. This is counterproductive, since *specific* vocabulary is being presented.

Along with the translation exercises, detailed written commentary on the material in the song should be provided to the students. Here verbs should be conjugated, and all irregularities should be pointed out. Special usage and idiomatic expressions must be explained. Collateral elements should be provided, i.e., elements not present in the song but related to the lyrics. These entries should be identified as such, e.g., as the appendix below demonstrates, entries directly related to the lyrics are marked with ¥ and collateral entries with ¥¥. Each entry in the commentary should be accompanied by an example of usage *not* taken from the song. In this manner the students will see the new linguistic material in different contexts. This commentary should be constructed in such a way that a student, armed with a dictionary, the text of the song and a basic grammar reference book, would be able to complete all the translation exercises.

10. After approximately every five songs a test should be administered. For this, students ought to have access to the recording of the songs in order to review the materials. The tests should consist of randomly selected excerpts from each of the songs. These excerpts can be prerecorded by the instructor on a separate tape. During the test, the students hear a given excerpt only once. They are then asked to write down the original and translate it below.

Conclusion

The technique described in this article is aimed at limiting the universe of possible meanings (see Ciccone above) in the listening comprehension process. This is accomplished in two major ways.

First, the selection of song-poems is a means of providing additional decoding cues stemming from the prosodic and musical structure of this material. Second, the tasks given to the students during the decoding process intensively concentrate their attention on the text in question. The result is a readjustment of comprehensible input. Even a well-articulated song presented on its own and simply played for the students is not likely to constitute comprehensible input. However, what we are proposing is intended to stretch $i+1$ in a manner that would not undermine comprehensible input. The decoding exercise helps to mobilize the information-rich structure of a song-poem in such a way that what otherwise might appear as a hazy jumble of words and sounds begins to come into focus. Furthermore, we have argued that this approach can serve to reduce anxiety and increase motivation in students, while at the same time encouraging the use of effective language learning strategies.

We have come across a few reports of song use in the foreign language classroom based on vigilance tasking (see Nord above). Brown (pp. 25-6) had students listen to a song once without any printed text. Then the students did preliminary exercises on the linguistic material of the song. Next, they were given the printed lyrics and listened to the song again. A similar method was used by Richard-Amato (p. 116). The approach closest to the one presented here is proposed by Urbancic and Vizmuller (pp. 82-4). It also involves a cloze copy of the lyrics. However, in this case a certain linguistic element is targeted by the blanks. Thus, the authors discuss a lesson where all the pronouns were removed from the text. The students were asked to fill them in as they listened to the song. However, no pauses were provided for this exercise, i.e., the song was played straight through, and the students had to keep up. The essential difference between what we propose here and these related approaches has to do with the intensiveness of the decoding task and the elements that facilitate this process, i.e., letter divisions in the blanks, identification of parts of speech, access to not one but two cloze versions, pauses after each segment and work with a dictionary.

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