Practices and Principles for Engaging the Three Communicative Modes in Spanish through Songs and Music

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Abstract: Songs and music offer a rich resource for the development of the three communicative modes (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational). Because students enjoy songs and willingly listen to them as a common diversion, the use of music in the Spanish classroom provides a natural way to combine this student pastime with the specific curricular goals of enhancing the basic skills of listening comprehension, reading, speaking, and writing. This paper offers a set of recommendations for incorporating music into the Spanish language curriculum at all levels. Additionally, specific examples and discussion for how to use these materials in the classroom are provided. Finally, suggestions for assessment activities are also presented.

Key Words: assessment, communicative modes, listening comprehension, music, pedagogy, resources, songs, Spanish curriculum

Introduction

Recognition that songs and music constitute excellent pedagogical resources for teaching a language has not gone unnoticed. Essays on their classroom use may be found for French (Abrate 1983; Brown 1975; Elliott 1977; Gelman 1961; Techmeier 1969; Zola and Sandvoss 1976), Italian (Barker 1987; Bruno 1989; D'Onofrio 1988; Nuessel and Cicogna 1991; Urbancic and Vizmuller 1981; Viera 1990), Japanese (Jolly 1975), and Spanish (Alvarez 1985; Anton 1990; Eddy 2007; MacRae 1961; Mason 1997).

In this article, a number of issues related to the successful integration of songs and music into the curriculum will be explored. First, it will provide a working definition of the notions of songs and music. Next, there will be a brief review of the extant literature concerning the introduction of these materials. Third, it offers specific recommendations and exemplification for the incorporation of a musical repertoire into the Spanish syllabus. Fourth, there will be a discussion of the three communicative modes (*Standards*, 37): (1) interpersonal, (2) interpretive, and (3) presentational. Finally, the article addresses assessment, the last stage for the introduction of songs in the Spanish curriculum.

Music and Songs

What is music? What is a song? The dictionary defines the former as "the art of organizing tones to produce coherent sequences to elicit an aesthetic response in the listener" (Morris 1979: 864), while the latter is described as "a brief musical composition written or adapted for singing" (Morris 1979: 1231). For the purposes of this discussion, the term song will be considered to be a fixed verbal text to be read or sung with possible musical accompaniment.

Zola and Sandvoss observe that song and speech share certain commonalities, namely, both

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are "produced in some form, structure, or organization, through time, with rhythm and tone, and express and communicate some content through language" (73). These same authors further specify that a song constitutes a *gestalt*-like entity which is "a potentially powerful language stimulus which can be optimally used in association and combination with other stimuli, such as visual/tactile, rhythmic/tonal, and movement/play stimuli" (75).

Rationale for the Use of Songs and Music

Obvious pedagogical techniques that employ song and music involve their implementation as a medium for pronunciation, morphological or syntactic patterns, vocabulary-building, and cultural aspects, to name but a few possibilities (cf. Bartle 1962). In this sense, previously cited studies deal with discrete point elements of these texts.

In their influential work on the "natural approach" to second-language acquisition, Krashen and Terrell (1988) dedicate a part of their text to the discussion of "acquisition activities" designed to promote the successful development of linguistic competency. One of the areas mentioned by the two authors is "input activities," a reference to the "input hypothesis," which states that "listening comprehension and reading are of primary importance in the language program, and that the ability to speak (or write) fluently in a second language will come on its own with time. Speaking fluency is thus not 'taught' directly; rather, speaking ability 'emerges' after the acquirer has built up competence through comprehending input" (32).

Within the Krashen-Terrell theoretical framework of second-language acquisition, songs constitute an excellent source of input for the student. Judicious selection of such "input" materials provides a valuable source for aural and written acquisition stimuli since they derive from scripted texts which are then vocalized. If this theoretical approach is employed, the instructor will need to develop an inventory of songs as a first step. From these materials, the teacher will need to choose exemplars that engage, rather than discourage the student.

D'Onofrio (1998: V) perhaps best recapitulates the special attractions that songs have for use in any second-language curriculum in the introduction to her manual on Italian songs and music:

> [M]usic in the second-language classroom is an advantageous tool that must be exploited in the teaching of language and in developing communicative competence in second-language students. Songs can reinforce grammar points already learned and increase vocabulary both actively and passively, while remaining a veritable wealth of material for the learning of both colloquial and literary expressions. Listening to and working with songs can aid greatly in enhancing aural comprehension and at the introductory stages can develop in the more advanced students an understanding of symbolic and metaphoric language, as well as the need for various registers and levels of speech.

Procedures for the Introduction of a Song

While the introduction of a song in a written or auditory format into the second-language curriculum may seem relatively trivial, some care needs to be exercised to ensure its successful curricular integration. The following recommendations to the instructor are designed to provide a successful environment for their curricular incorporation.

1. Develop an inventory of materials including books with published songs and CDs with actual performances (available from large record stores or on-line for downloading in accordance with legally accepted usage of such materials). Such collections would ideally include a wide range of materials (popular and traditional songs) to reflect the vast array of the creative realm of the Hispanic musical repertoire.
2. Acquire a dependable music player with good sound projection characteristics to ensure proper audibility in the classroom or individual sources such as earphones and computers or iPods.

3. Use songs with clear enunciation and a minimum of instrumentation to facilitate compre-
    hension. In the introductory phase, avoid songs that are difficult to understand, use
    unfamiliar grammar, dialects, and totally unfamiliar vocabulary.

4. Provide some basic information about the song (theme, historical event, cultural con-
    tent, etc.) and the singer (region, success of musician, other works, etc.) prior to an
    audition of the song.

5. Select appropriate exemplars that reflect the linguistic and cultural topics being studied
    in the classroom. This aspect of integration is crucial to the harmonious incorporation of
    these documents into the curriculum (Jolly 1975: 14). Any materials introduced into the
    classroom should not be "for Friday only," to borrow a phrase from Mollica (1985), who
    points out that many worthwhile learning opportunities are relegated to Fridays and
    periods before a holiday.

6. Include appropriate songs in a consistent, though not excessive fashion to reinforce
    grammatical or cultural materials, and to ensure that such elements are perceived as a
    normal part of the classroom routine.

7. Introduce pedagogical graphics to enhance the instructive value of the songs (Danesi
    1983). Systematic use of geometric visual elements (circles, squares, triangles), or con-
    trastive typeface (bold, italic, upper case, etc.) has been proven empirically to enhance
    learning by helping the student to increase retention and to facilitate learning no matter
    what the age, background or learning style of the individual (Danesi 2000, 2003). In the
    case of a song text, methodical and systematic exploitation of graphics may be em-
    ployed to signal parts of speech, derivationally related lexical items, lexical semantic
    fields, etc.

8. Follow the conventional manner of introducing new materials: (a) Pre-listening or pre-
    reading of the song with appropriate linguistic and cultural information about the con-
    tent and the context of the piece; (b) audition or reading of the song; (c) post-listening
    or post-reading activities that include content exercises and activities as well as creative
    tasks in which students utilize the song and its content to invent and create linguistic
    scenarios based on the prompt.

In the remainder of this article, specific proposals for the introduction of songs into the language
class will be offered under the rubrics of three communicative modes (interpretive, interpersonal,
presentational). Assessment strategies will also be presented.

The Three Communicative Modes

The three communicative modes (*Standards* 1998: 37) include: (1) The interpersonal mode
which involves interactive communication (listening, speaking, reading, writing); (2) the inter-
pretive mode which involves receptive communication (listening and reading); and (3) the
presentational mode which involves productive communication (speaking, writing). In the
following three subsections, each mode will be addressed.

Interpersonal Mode
    Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999: 37) defines the inter-
personal mode of communication as "direct oral communication (e.g, face-to-face or telephonic)
between individuals who are in personal contact" or "direct written communication between
individuals who come into personal contact." The paths for the interpersonal communicative
mode include "productive abilities: speaking and writing" and "receptive abilities: listening and
reading." Thus, we may speak of the "interpersonal mode of communication in terms of inter-
personal reading and writing and interpersonal listening and speaking."
    The teacher may elect to engage the students in singing the song as an introductory activity.
The most obvious speaking activity is the essentially rote process of learning a song and being

able to sing it as a group or perhaps individually. The latter, however, is fraught with potential difficulties since some students, or even the instructor, may be timid or self-conscious (Bartle 1962: 13).

Likewise, the dramatization of a particular song can add zest to the classroom experience (Pattison 1987). In this regard, Zola and Sandvoss (1976) provide a suggestion for what amounts to a Total Physical Response approach to acting out the content of a song (see Larsen-Freeman 1986: 109–22). Di Pietro (1987) provides a scenario format in which students are presented with a likely personal interaction, the dissolution of an intimate relationship, e.g., a breakup between lovers (Estefan, "Volverás"). The teacher can write a scenario in which one person breaks off a relationship with another that the students may subsequently enact.

Systematic development of a set of oral questions related to polemical topics will enliven class exercises. This type of oral exercise stimulates conversation since students are often willing to express themselves about these issues, e.g., ecological problems (Maná, "Cuando los ángeles lloran" *Luna*). Students should be encouraged to compare, contrast, and list songs from their own culture that speak to similar issues.

La Bamba has been sung by many different groups during the past half century (see below: Interpretive mode). A worthwhile interpersonal activity would be to play two or more ver-sions of the song and ask students to compare/contrast and comment on which is their favorite version and why. Likewise, a discussion might take place about why the versions differ based on cultural characteristics of the performers.

Interpretive Mode

Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21ˢᵗ Century (1999: 37) defines the interpretive mode as "… receptive communication of oral or written messages […] mediated communication via print and non-print materials […]. Listener, viewer, reader works with visual or recorded materials whose creator is absent." Furthermore, the paths for interpretive mode are "primarily receptive abilities: listening, reading, viewing" (37). The interpretive mode of com-munication thus consists of interpretive reading and interpretive listening.

Songs provide an ideal format to address the interpretive communicative mode. First, in their purely vocal and auditory format, they allow students to comprehend the spoken language in a variety of registers, styles, and formats (Rost 1990). Second, as printed texts, students may inter-pret them as a written document (Swaffar, Arens, Byrnes 1991). Third, songs offer enhancement of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. Finally, music videos also provide students with the opportunity to interpret non-verbal communication including kinesics, paralanguage, and proxemics (Nuessel 1985).

Prudent and early introduction of selected songs into the classroom will help familiarize students with this form of auditory comprehension. With the "natural approach" to second-language acquisition, the "input hypothesis" constitutes a strong argument for the presentation of songs as a worthwhile listening activity for neophyte language students (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 32–37). Consequently, the introduction of a song as an aural input activity is appropriate. The song *La bamba* (1959) is one of the best-known songs worldwide. Sung by Ritchie Valens, the pseudonym of Richard Valenzuela (1941–1959) whose life was chronicled in the 1987 film *La bamba* starring Lou Diamond Phillips, its virtual universal familiarity and the catchy tune make this an ideal introductory gambit. In the film (*La bamba*), Los Lobos covered this now famous song which became a number 1 hit. When Ritchie Valens sang it, it only reached number 8. Many other Hispanics have covered this song including Selena (1971–1995), Caifanes (rock group, Mexico, 1987–1995), Café Tacuba (rock group from Mexico, 1989–), Circo (rock group, Puerto Rico, 2001–), El Gran Silencio (rock group, Mexico, 1993–), Aterciopelados (rock group, Bogotá, 1992–), and Gustavo Santaolalla (Buenos Aires, 1952–), to name but a few. The use of a rea-sonably simple musical text in combination with a series of short-answer questions helps to build up the self-confidence of each class member. Moreover, early integration of songs into the cur-riculum renders the activity a normal part of the class routine.

Another worthwhile technique is the formulation of oral or written questions about the content of songs previously auditioned (authentic interpretive listening material). A short, simple, albeit thought-provoking song such as *Ayer* by Gloria Estefan (Cuba 1957) allows the instruc-tor to ask simple questions that focus on the predicates of the song, many of which are in the preterite tense. Sample questions include the following:

a.   *¿Qué encontraste? (la flor)*
b.   *¿Qué me escribiste? (la carta)*
c.   *¿Qué puso triste a la cantante? (la firma)*

In this same song, the singer offers people advice in the form of action predicates in command forms. What are they? (*¡Levántense!*, *¡Gocen!*, *¡Alégrense!*, *¡Tiren todas las penas!*, *¡Gocen!*, *¡Anímense!*, *¡Sacúdanse!*, *¡Acérquense!*). You can challenge students to add their own advice to the situation with more predicates in command forms.

Songs may be treated as poetic texts or short stories. In this sense, they serve as examples of authentic interpretive reading material. Universal themes such as love abound. The web site <http://www.spanishromance.com/spanishlanguage/lyrics/view.asp?id=123> provides numer-ous examples that address various aspects of the very popular theme of love. The texts of the songs on this site can provide a wide variety of reactions and commentary on the subject.

A second literary approach to songs is to examine figurative language. Metaphor, some-times simplistically defined as a figure of speech in which one term is used to designate another element through an implied comparison, is one area to scrutinize (Nuessel 1988). Discuss the use of metaphoric language in an advanced class in light of current theory on the topic (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). An exemplary song to demonstrate metaphoric language is "No ha parado de llover" (Maná *Luna*) in which the singer likens his loss of love to negative climatological conditions (rain, fog).

Idiomatic language often appears in songs. Because knowledge of idioms is essential to an understanding of Spanish, and since most songs contain worthwhile examples of popular and useful idiomatic expressions, these musical compositions provide excellent, contextually-based examples of these language-specific expressions. One example is the expression *parar de* + infinitive *llover* (= to stop raining) in the title of Maná's song "No ha parado de llover."

Vocabulary for reading and speaking may be augmented by eliciting words that are derivative from lexical items in the song proper. Patterns of derivational morphology may be demonstrated in exercises which refer directly to a term in a particular song. The song *Ayer* (Estefan), facilitates the preparation of an exercise focusing on adjectives derived from nouns, e.g., *orgullo-orgulloso*, *rencor-rencoroso*, *duda-dudoso*, etc.

Presentational Mode
    Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (37) defines the presenta-tional communicative mode as "Productive communication using oral or written language .... Spoken or written communication for people (an audience) with whom there is no immediate personal contact or which takes place in a one-to-many mode .... Author or creator of visual or recorded material not known personally to the listener or reader." Its path is "primarily productive abilities: speaking, writing, showing" (37). Thus, we may speak of the presentational mode of communication in terms of presentational communication-speaking and presentational communi-cation-writing.

Having students create a written summary of the contents of a particular song under analy-sis limits vocabulary difficulties while simultaneously focusing on special expressions (Raimes 1983). Musical compositions that refer to an event, e.g., offer superb examples of appealing works.

A second activity certain to produce worthwhile results is to direct students to compose an original song. A "warm-up" or preparatory activity might involve asking students to add a new

verse to an existing song, or to re-write the final verse for a song they already know. It may be necessary to persuade the class that it is not as difficult as they might imagine. To counter any phobic reaction to such a task, provide a "recipe" for writing an unrhymed song. Select a topic such as love and tell students to describe a person they care about using qualifying adjectives. A selected vocabulary (*gustar*, *querer*, *simpático/a*, etc.) will ensure that students do not become discouraged. In addition, students may be asked to complete an unfinished verse, or compose a final verse.

The following Table represents a summary of the ways in which songs may be used in conjunction with the three communicative modes.

Table 1
Songs and the Three Communicative Modes

Song-Related Sample Activities for Interpersonal Mode	Song-Related Sample Activities for Interpretive Mode	Song-Related Sample Activities for Presentational Mode
Singing the song Dramatization of song or part of song (TPR) Oral questions about controversial topics/ideas in song Compare/contrast two different versions of a song	Listening comprehension with oral questions focused on predicates in song Treat song as literary text Examine figurative language in song lyrics Study of idioms Vocabulary exercises	Summarize the contents of the song (oral or written) Add new verse to song Re-write the final verse of song Compose original song

Assessment

The following is a summary of assessment strategies for songs and music in the classroom (Nuessel 1991; Nuessel and Cicogna 1991).

1. Interpersonal Communicative Mode (Interactive Communication: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)
    a. Engage students in dramatizations of a song (Di Pietro 1987). Use appropriate non-verbal communication including kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics. Evaluate students on the basis of verbal and non-verbal appropriateness of their performance.
    b. Ask students to sing a song as a way of evaluating phonetic aspects of their pronunciation.

2. Interpretive Communicative Mode (Receptive Communication: Listening, Reading)
    a. Dictate a segment of a song to evaluate students' aural comprehension skills (Davis and Rinvolucri 1988) with followup oral or written questions over the content including gist, detail, inference questions, connections and comparisons.
    b. Reproduce the text on a quiz or examination. Elicit oral or written responses to the content. Include personalized, open-ended questions (e.g., What is your opinion? What would you do in this situation? etc.).
    c. Elicit appropriate antonyms based on vocabulary in a particular song as a vocabulary- specific exercise according to the following format.
        fácil _____ (*dificil*)
        bello _____ (*feo*)
    d. Test word formation skills by requesting students to produce a word (adjective, noun, adverb, etc.) derived from a frequently occurring vocabulary item in songs utilized in the class.
    e. Employ Cloze tests to determine students' comprehension. In the Cloze procedure a blank appears usually in every seventh word of the text. Use a modified Cloze pro-

cedure to focus on a particular grammar point. In this approach, the student may be asked to fill in a blank with an appropriate predicate or preposition. Such a testing program facilitates linkage of songs with particular grammatical points presented in the text proper.

    f.   Create well-formulated "true-false" statements to determine if students understand the meaning of a song.

    g.   Introduce an element of fun in the evaluation procedure. Danesi has argued for the use of puzzles (solitary activities) in the second-language classroom (Danesi 1985a; Mollica 1979, 1981; Nuessel 1992, 1994, 2006). A number of time-honored activities, exceptionally well-illustrated in Danesi (1985a,b), can be used to test songs and related materials used in the classroom, e.g., discrete point puzzles such as word searches, crossword puzzles, scrambled letters, jumbles, word tic-tac-toe, match-ups, word mazes, cryptograms, etc. (Danesi 1985a,b; Nuessel 2006). All of these procedures may be used as linguistic activities and evaluation techniques.

3.   Presentational Communicative Mode (Productive Communication: Speaking, Writing)

    a.   Use Eddy's (2007) extensive list of performance-based assessment which consists of a list of 35 separate activities and tasks (145–46). These include the following five examples (from a list of thirty-five): (1) compose poetry (= song lyrics); (2) create your own music video for the song; (3) critique the song as if you were a music critic; (4) write a four-line song plot for CD liners; and (5) assume the role of a singer. Many of these activities may be done in oral or written format.

Concluding Remarks

Certain concepts related to the curricular integration of music and songs were reviewed (the nature of music and songs, the song as a semiotic act). In addition, a brief review of the extant literature on the use of songs ensued. Third, a discussion of specific techniques with examples for the introduction of songs into the Spanish language classroom was elaborated (interpersonal, interpretive, presentational modes). Finally, evaluation procedures were presented. In summary, it is clear that the judicious selection of songs and music can enhance the Spanish curriculum and add a decidedly positive element to the classroom.

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