

A Use of Songs for Teaching English Pronunciation in Elementary School

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<Abstract>

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Hong, Kyung Suk

How to teach intelligible, communicative pronunciation is a continuous question in the English education. Without good input, we can not expect good output. However, in EFL situation, it is very difficult to input the good English pronunciation, therefore, we have to find out the efficient and effective material for teaching pronunciation. One of the materials is song, because songs contain the linguistic and cultural traits of the language.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the reason why songs are good for teaching pronunciation. Koreans, who are syllable timed language users, have difficulties in English pronunciation of stress, rhythm, consonants cluster, linking or blending in connected speech. The 134 songs from wee sing are analyzed for how these traits show in songs. The result shows that we can acquire the traits easily and naturally through songs. And a lesson plan is offered as an example for teaching songs.

1. Introduction

The question that has been brought up continuously in the English education is how to teach intelligible, communicative and efficient pronunciation, even though it is not native-like. Good pronunciation, which affects not only speaking but listening, is the essential factor to facilitate communication, however, to teach good pronunciation is not easy, especially in foreign country. In EFL situation, students do not have enough chances to see and hear how the native speakers say, also, to learn and correct their pronunciation in the outside of the classroom.

One of the reasons to teach English in elementary school is the children's strong point in language acquisition - that is, children are good at imitating and learning the model of pronunciation easier than adults. Therefore, to be effective in the early English education, we should get the intelligible and efficient output through the input of good and correct English from the beginning of English education. We have to explore teaching or learning material which not only contains the linguistic and cultural traits of English but also is easy to learn and transfer to real discourse. One of these materials is songs.

Songs reflect the nation's emotion and the characteristics of the language. Moreover, everybody likes songs, especially children. Because of the trait that is easy to remember and repeat, songs have been employed in teaching vocabulary and structure. Tim Murphy(1996) states the reason that music is highly memorable, is its rhythms correspond in some way with basic body rhythm, the messages touch our emotional and aesthetic chords, and the repetitive patterning reinforces learning without loss of motivation, therefore music and songs create 'stick in my head' phenomenon.

The purpose of this paper is i) to clarify the effectiveness of using songs in teaching English pronunciation by analyzing the error of Korean's pronunciation, and how this kind of phonological phenomenon is reflected in songs(wee sing), ii) to explore the efficient procedure in teaching pronunciation through songs.

Because the native children have liked to sing Wee sing for a long time, the songs contain the linguistic traits of English, and they suit children's sentiments, Wee sing is chosen as the data for analyzing.

In this study, 134 songs are analyzed out of 'Musical games and rhymes for children(24)', 'Nursery rhymes & Lullabies(53)', 'Children's Songs and Fingerplay(42)', and 'Games, games, games(15)' edited by Pamela Conn Beall & Susan Hagen Nipp. These songs were used for analyzing rhythm, consonants cluster,

linking and contraction, and for clarifying the reason why the using songs is effective in teaching English pronunciation.

2. The Characteristics of English in Songs

2.1. Stress and Rhythm

One of the most difficult factors for Korean who is a syllable-timed language user to acquire English, is the stress and rhythm of English, the stress-timed language. Adams(1972) argued that English rhythm was the key to speak English fluently, and inappropriate rhythm could be an ultimate obstacle in not only production but perception the language. English has a isochronism, which means that stressed beats occur more or less equal intervals of time, regardless of how many syllables there are between each beat. To maintain this isochronism, the phonological phenomenon like weak form, contractions or resolution play important roles. For Korean users who use a syllable-times language that the syllable number is the same that the utterance time, the acquisition of these phonological phenomenon is very difficult, and this syllable timed speaking habit could be a serious obstacle for intelligible communication.

Abercrombie(1964) gave emphasis to the absolute need of foot in isochronous intervals and represented the length of a sound by musical notes based on rhythm. Hayes and Kaun(1994) thought there were a fixed rhythmic pattern in English folk songs, and analyzed the rhythm in English folk songs according to the textsetting of iambic pentameter. Kim Keyseop(1999) stated that the rhythm in music reflected the various kinds of rhythm in utterance, therefore, music was very useful for acquisition of English stress and rhythm.

In this study, the distribution patterns of rhythm out of 134 songs were examined for understanding the relation between the strong beat in songs and the stress of the words in lyrics.

According to the <table 1>, the 4/4 beat pattern has the great portion in wee sing. Moreover, the 4/4 beat and 6/8 beat can be the SW pattern(After omitting the W beat in 4/4 beat and 6/8 beat, we can find the rhythm patterns become SW, too). Therefore, 2/4, 4/4, 6/8 beat have same rhythm pattern, and SW pattern becomes an overwhelming majority in the songs(94.78%). This means that Wee sing prefer the two beat or four beat rhythm, because the alternation of strong and weak beat in

songs makes possible to adjust the speech rhythm, and easy to keep time by clapping or fingerplay while singing.

<Table 1> The distribution of the rhythm pattern(strong:◎, semistrong:○, weak:○)

beat pattern	2/2	2/4	3/4	4/4	6/8	sum
rhythm pattern	◎○	◎ ○	◎ ○ ○	◎ ○ ○ ○	◎○○○○○	
	SW	SW	S W W	S W (S) W	SWW(S)WW	
numbers	2	28	7	55	42	134
(%)	1.50	20.90	5.22	41.04	31.34	100

English is divided into content words and function words. Content words get strong stress, for they contribute the meaning of the sentence(because they deliver usually main meaning of the utterance), and function words get weak stress except several cases. When the function words get weak stress between strong stress, they adjust the rhythm by compression or vowel weakening. However, Korean users have a tendency to pronounce every syllable clearly and with roughly same length, in other words they usually pronounce with same length not discriminating contents and function words. This tendency has them make errors in pronunciation not to discriminate which is important or not.

To know if we can acquire the English rhythm naturally through singing songs, I examined the interrelation between the sentence or lexical stress and strong beat in song. The words with on the strong beat are content words like nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc, but, sometimes some function words like prepositions or pronouns have the strong beat according to the stress rule, emphasis, or contrast.

The words with on the weak beat are function words, weak syllables, or polysyllables which begin with weak syllable. The following song shows what kind of stress are disposed on the function words and the words which begin weak syllables.

- (1) 4/4 ♪ / ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪
- There** **was** **a** crooked man **and** he
- ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ (♪) ♪
- walked **a** crooked mile, **He**
- ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪
- found **a** crooked six pence **up-**

♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ (♪) ♪
 on a crooked stile, He
 ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ (♪) ♪
 bought a crooked cat which
 ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪
 caught a crooked mouse. And they
 ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪
 all lived to- geth- er in a
 ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ (♪)
 crooked little house.

- A syncopated rhythm is used to put **there**, which is the prehead of a tonal unit, on the weak beat, therefore **was** gets the strong beat.
- An article **a** is on the strong beat being resolved to the precede monosyllable.
- A conjunction **and**, and a pronoun **he**, **they**, **which**, a preposition **in** get weak beats.
- **upon** and **together** begin with weak syllable, therefore, **up-** and **to-** begin with weak beat being resolved to the precede syllable, and **-on** and **-gether** are put on the strong beat.
- ‘crooked man’, which is a noun phrase(NSR), get stress on **man**, and it is put on semistrong in this song.

When the initial weak syllable is in the first line, the syncopated rhythm in music is used to adjust the rhythm like this song. Among the data, 37 songs(27.61%) use the syncopated rhythm.

- (2) ① articles: the(♪ or ♪), A(♪ or ♪)
- ② preposition: To(♪)
- ③ pronouns: I (♪ or ♪), We(♪), It(♪)
- ④ exclamation: Oh(♪ or ♪)
- ⑤ adjective: Good(♪ or ♪)
- ⑥ pronoun+verb+(article): I’m(♪), I’ve a (♪ ♪)
- ⑦ auxiliary +pronoun: Have you(♪ ♪), Did you(♪ ♪)
- ⑧ exclamation + article : Oh, the(♪)
- ⑨ expletive : there(♪)

Also, contractions are used for rhythm adjustment. Each contracted word gets musical notes as many as it's syllables, therefore, the Korean user, who is easy to mispronounce like [itsi], [aivi], can acquire correct pronunciation of the contracted words through singing songs. The cases are as follow:

- (3) ① pronoun+is/has : that's(♪), it's(♪), Here's(♪), he's(♪), there's(♪)
 ② pronoun+be verb : I'm(♪), you're(♪)
 ③ pronoun+have : they've(♪), I've(♪)
 ④ auxiliary/verb+not : won't(♪), don't(♪), can't(♪), couldn't(♩, ♩♪), isn't(♪♪)
 ⑤ pronoun+will: what'll(♪), we'll(♪), he'll(♪), she'll(♪), I'll(♪), they'll(♪)
 ⑥ contraction of initial syllable : 'twas(♪), 'til(♪), 'round(♪), 'fore(♪)
 ⑦ contraction in a word : ev'ry(♪♪, ♩), o'er(♪, ♩)

Like the above result, the fact that the strong/weak stress of words of lyrics coincide with the strong/weak beat in songs shows that songs reflect the rhythm of the language. Therefore, to make learner acquire the rhythm naturally, who used the rhythm of the language is placed properly, using songs are very useful.

2.2. Consonant cluster

The syllable types of English differ from the ones of Korean. The syllable types of English allow three consonants in the initial, and four consonants in the final, with nucleus in the center. Therefore, the structure of the syllable is as follow:

- (4) (C) (C) (C) V (C) (C) (C) (C)

This structure makes twenty kinds of syllable types of English. On the other hand, the syllable types of Korean is like this:

- (5) (C) V (C)

The syllable types of Korean cause the error of resyllabification to insert vowels between the consonants. For example, 'desk[desk]' is pronounced to [desiki] after inserting [i]. Therefore, the one syllable word 'strike' is pronounced [siri:raiki]. This is one of the important factors which the English song composer or songwriter have

to consider. They have to accord the numbers of musical note, except using slur or tie, with the numbers of syllable.

<Table 2> The consonant cluster with assigned notes in wee sing

pattern of cluster		example
initial cluster (C)(C)		<u>bridge</u> (ʃ), <u>blue</u> (ʃ), <u>cry</u> (ʃ), <u>clock</u> (ʃ), <u>dress</u> (ʃ), <u>fleece</u> (ʃ), <u>frog</u> (ʃ), <u>grow</u> (ʃ), <u>plum</u> (ʃ), <u>prick</u> (ʃ), <u>skip</u> (ʃ), <u>slide</u> (ʃ), <u>spider</u> (ʃ ʃ), <u>station</u> (ʃ ʃ), <u>small</u> (ʃ), <u>snow</u> (ʃ), <u>sport</u> (ʃ), <u>tree</u> (ʃ), <u>through</u> (ʃ)
initial cluster (C)(C)(C)		<u>stretching</u> (ʃʃ), <u>string</u> (ʃ), <u>sprat</u> (ʃ), <u>struck</u> (ʃ), <u>straight</u> (ʃ), <u>spread</u> (ʃ)
final cluster	(C)(C)	<u>bench</u> (ʃ), <u>bags</u> (ʃ), <u>birds</u> (ʃ), <u>chased</u> (ʃ), <u>chicks</u> (ʃ), <u>called</u> (ʃ), <u>child</u> (ʃ), <u>fast</u> (ʃ), <u>jump</u> (ʃ), <u>lives</u> (ʃ), <u>laughed</u> (ʃ), <u>left</u> (ʃ), <u>loved</u> (ʃ), <u>marched</u> (ʃ), <u>must</u> (ʃ), <u>picked</u> (ʃ), <u>thank</u> (ʃ), <u>soft</u> (ʃ), <u>walked</u> (ʃ), <u>wants</u> (ʃ)
	(C)(C)(C)	<u>collapsed</u> (ʃ), <u>elves</u> (ʃ), <u>(your)selves</u> (ʃ)
initial and final cluster		<u>blacks</u> (ʃ), <u>blessed</u> (ʃ), <u>blinked</u> (ʃ), <u>breaks</u> (ʃ), <u>creeps</u> (ʃ), <u>clothes</u> (ʃ), <u>dropped</u> (ʃ), <u>drift</u> (ʃ), <u>flicked</u> (ʃ), <u>Schmidt</u> (ʃ), <u>sticks</u> (ʃ), <u>sleeps</u> (ʃ)

As the <table 2> shows, each syllable is assigned one note, no matter how many consonants the syllable has. It prevents the error of resyllabification of syllable-timed language user through singing songs.

2.3. Connected Speech

When we teach English pronunciation, it is important to teach not only the individual sound but also the connected speech. One of the traits in English pronunciation is ‘linking’ and ‘blending’ which make the pronunciation move smoothly from one word to the next. When the last sound of a word in a rhythm group and the first sound in the following word is (consonant)+(vowel), (vowel /iy/, /ey/, /ay/, /oy/, or /uw/, /ow/, /aw/)+(vowel) is linking, and when two of the same consonant sounds are between words, and the consonants are pronounced like one long consonant, is blending.

Because Koreans have a tendency to pronounce each word exactly, and their pronunciation sound like stacato, the teacher has to teach the pronunciation of the connected speech. Singing songs make the linking, blending, and palatalization be pronounced more easily and naturally than speaking.

<Table 3> Linking, Blending, and Palatalization in Wee Sing

		example
link	(consonant) +(vowel)	shake <u>i</u> t (ㄷ ㅈ), put <u>i</u> t <u>i</u> n (ㄷ ㅈ ㅈ), round <u>a</u> nd (ㄱ ㄱ), stick <u>o</u> f(ㄴ)
	(vowel) +(vowel)	pick <u>u</u> p(ㄴ), went <u>o</u> t (ㄷ ㄱ), pick <u>e</u> d <u>i</u> t <u>u</u> p (ㄷ ㅈ ㅈ)
-ing	(vowel) +(vowel)	know <u>i</u> t(ㄴ), say <u>a</u> (ㄴ), show <u>y</u> our(ㄱ ㄱ)
blending		went <u>t</u> o(ㄱ ㄱ), red <u>d</u> ress(ㄱ ㄱ), nut <u>t</u> ree(ㄱ ㄱ), yes <u>s</u> ir(ㄱ ㄱ)
palatalization		put <u>y</u> our(ㄷ ㅈ), and <u>y</u> ou(ㄴ), don't <u>y</u> ou(ㄱ ㄱ), kiss <u>y</u> our(ㄱ ㅈ), close <u>y</u> our(ㄱ ㄱ), wish <u>y</u> ou(ㄱ ㅈ)

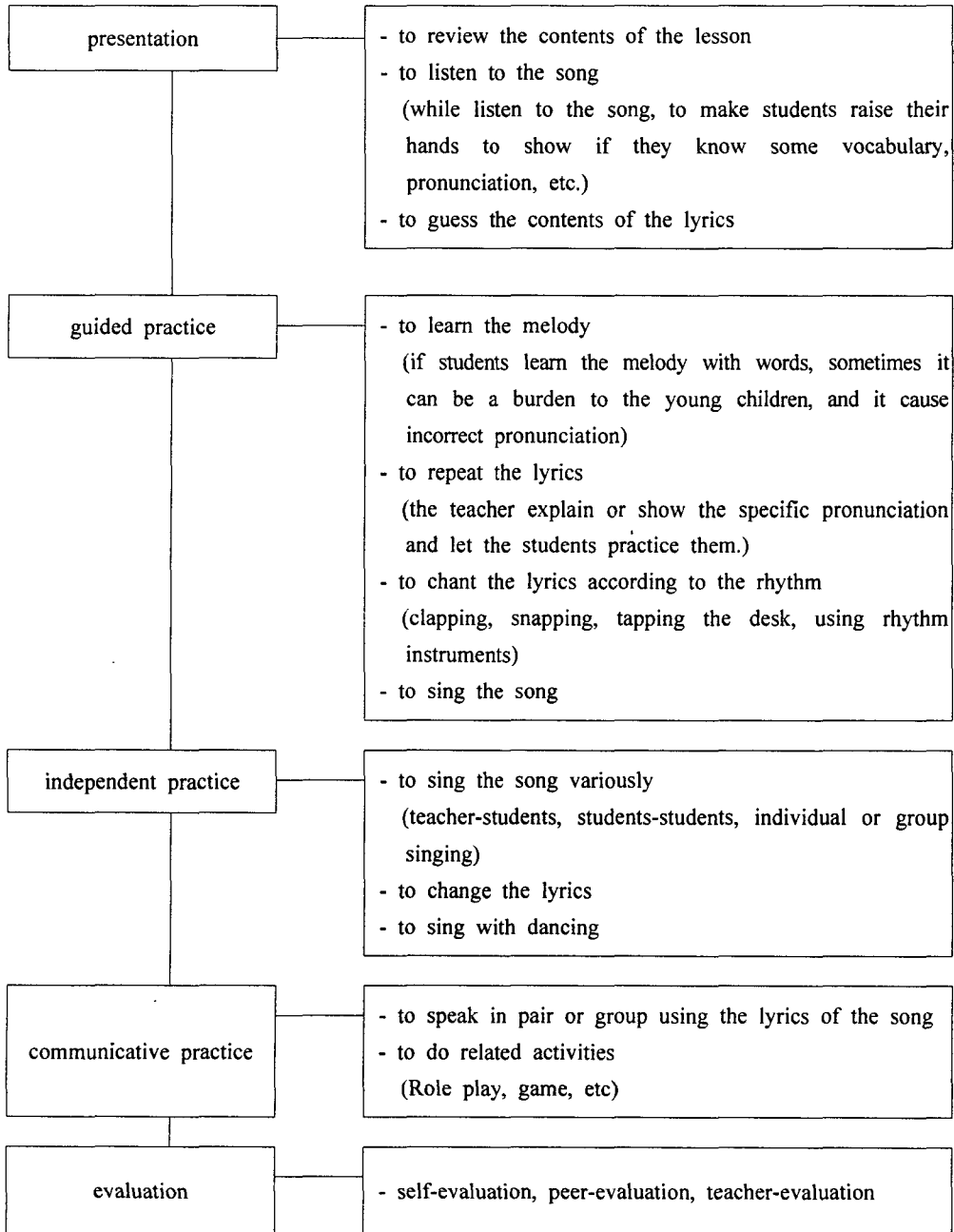
3. The Development of Pronunciation Lesson Using Songs

Singing song is interesting, easy to arouse and maintain motivation, and to teach not only pronunciation but also vocabulary and structure. However, even though it has a lot of advantages, we can not use only music in 40 minutes of a class. Because the elementary school students have relatively short concentration time, they need various kinds of teaching methods and materials.

When we choose songs for teaching, we have to consider the musical traits of English songs for children. There are musical keys and ranges which are appropriate to sing for children. Wee sing use C major(43.28%), G major(13.43%), D major(16.42%), and F major(13.43%), etc. Also, the ranges are 8 degree(31.34%), 6 degree(26.12%), and 9 degree(18.55%), etc. This means children song has to be easy and simple to sing.

We can use songs for the presentation and the consolidation of the lesson. For the presentation, songs are used to motivate and introduce the content of the lesson, and for the consolidation, to synthesize and apply the content to another activities. If a teacher wants to use a song for presentation, the teacher spends much time for teaching the song, and for consolidation, the teacher spends much time for using the song. Next example of lesson plan is made in consideration of consolidation.

<table 4> Lesson Plan(Example)



4. Conclusion

To acquire the correct pronunciation in foreign language learning is the necessary to achieve the accuracy and fluency of communication. Foreign learners have a tendency to speak or hear the sound of English according to the sound of their native language. Therefore, the effort to recognize the errors in pronunciation and to correct them is needed for the acquisition of intelligible pronunciation.

Songs are interesting, highly memorable, and everybody likes singing, especially children. Therefore, songs have been used for teaching new vocabulary and structure. A lot of scholars argue that songs reflect the traits of the language because songs have been sung for a long time. The purpose of this study is to find out how songs are effective in teaching pronunciation.

Through this study I come to several conclusions as follows;

First, what the Korean's general errors in English pronunciation are, and how those problems can be solved through using songs. Second, Stress and rhythm can be acquired naturally by sing songs, because the alternation of the strong and weak beat in songs is accordant with the strong/weak stress in language. Third, the error of resyllabification can be solved by the rule of assigning one note to each syllable. Fourth, English, different from Korean, has a traits to be spoken smoothly between words, and this problem can be solved while singing songs. Finally, an example of lesson plan to teach pronunciation through song is offered, but this plan has to be transformed according to the learners or class situation.

Teaching English pronunciation in EFL situation has a lot of difficulties. Songs can be used as an effective teaching and learning material to overcome the difficulties.

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