

# Pop Music Lyrics

—An Alternative Guide to Teaching English for  
University Students—

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## 1. Introduction

All teachers know the feeling when there are fifteen minutes left in the class and the students look bored. They are faced with a decision to keep plodding along with the textbook or change the topic. This inquiry will conceptualize the inclusion of pop music as an alternative in the English Second Language (ESL) classroom. Moreover, implies music should be factored into the designs of lesson plans. Essentially, deconstructing a fragment of a song. In this case, the opening of ‘Castle on the Hill’ sung by Ed Sheeran for detailed analysis. Compromising with pop songs instead of sticking to the prescribed text comes with possible flaws. Herein, the approach outlined will assist language instructors to facilitate a lesson with transcripts and methods adapted. YouTube is a popular internet site being used by students, so that will also be used as a tool.

Revell and Norman (1997) specify a preferred style of learning is through auditory measures. Looking at interest levels of participants would be a con-

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sideration central to planning an English lesson. Dornyei (2001) advocates there are many factors with what motivates ESL learners. Warning that speaking in a foreign language may come with some contention. For instructors it can be a challenging task making the learning space safe and enjoyable. Gardner (1983) considers ‘multiple intelligences’ or ‘MI theory’ which attests various abilities. One being musical aptitude. Nonetheless, very few people dislike listening to music. Being possessed with instrumental skills does not influence ones motivation in listening to music. Simply, the individual can appreciate the sound a poetic song.

## 2. Background

Information for this research has been collected from working at three different universities in Japan. For university students themselves, they have gone through the process of transitioning from preschool throughout their lifetime. The welcoming songs and finger play is put aside for a pencil which is then taken over by a pen. The rules of learning go from playful to formal. This cognitive development occurs in a logical order and internalize by oneself. Piaget (1926, cited in McInerney & McInerney, 2006) coined the term ‘schema’. While children are developing their language ability they often substitute words or phrases to match their level of cognitive development. Ingram (1986) describes this as a form of ‘simplification’ as a common way of expressing meaning with the level of motor skills. For instance, many children may have difficulty saying a word such as ‘brother’ babbling it out as ‘baabbaa’. To pronounce the ‘BR’ and ‘TH’ along with hundreds of other sounds improves and they begin to articulate morphemes into smaller grammatically correct parts. In terms of speaking in a second language, many speech patterns have

permanently stabilised by the time of entering university. Selinker (1972) coined the term 'Interlanguage' from L1 interference into L2. Once fossilization takes place, the student requires training to break habits of interference from the first language, which result in common language errors (Brown, 1973).

### **3. Aims**

The aim of this research is to memorize the two sentences and the linguistic structures of the Ed Sheeran song, 'Castle on the Hill'. More specifically, to master those two sentences without first language interference or interlanguage. In doing so, will create intrinsic motivation for ESL undergraduates to learn English through pop music lyrics. With the intension of learners being able to remember information and relate it into real life situation. Young adults will practice outside of classroom using their mobile devises. As this language content is available on YouTube learners will access this information readily anytime. Therefore, listening regularly is a realistic goal. On top of this, students should be able to use the techniques from English class to learn other songs sung by their favourite singers. In addition, fellow ESL instructors can use the techniques to incorporate into their personal practices too.

### **4. Syntax and Grammar Points for Classroom**

According to Jonassen (1999) who explains the role of the teacher is to breakdown previously learnt schema within a lively learning environment. Doing this will enhance opportunities to build ESL communication capabilities. Willis (1990) refers to building vocabulary in chunks or phrases as a 'Lexical Approach'. Using word combination and phrases which are used in routine

situations. An example of ‘Castle on the Hill’ vocabulary of interest has been capitalised in bold text. ‘When I was’, ‘**SIX** years old’, ‘I broke my **LEG**’, ‘I was **RUNNING**’, ‘My **BROTHER** and his **FRIENDS**’

The teacher checks understanding by using grouping in their concept check questioning in figure 4.0. In addition, in figure 4.1 morpheme ‘Friend’ or Friends’ is included. Once this activity is complete, students create their own sentence. After the concept check questions, students created their own experiences of breaking body parts. Shown in 4.3 Student 1.

Figure 4.0

Teacher	<i><b>When I was FORTY-SEVEN YEARS OLD,</b></i>
Students	<i>No, six</i>
Teacher	<i><b>SIXTEEN YEARS OLD,</b></i>
Students	<i><b>SIX YEARS OLD</b></i>
Teacher	<i>Did you say, “sixty years old?”.</i>
Students	<i>No, <b>SIX</b> years old.</i>
Teacher	<i>Oh, <b>SIX</b> years old. By the way, I’m <b>FORTY-SEVEN</b>. How old are you?</i>
Students	<i>no answer no body language</i>
Teacher	<i><b>EIGHTEEN</b> (head nods) <b>NINETEEN</b> (head nods) <b>TWENTY</b> (one nod)</i>
Students	<i>Mix responses</i>
Teacher	<i>I broke my <b>ARM, WRIST, ELBOW, ANKLE, NECK</b></i>
Break	<i><b>Group praise, Good JOB!</b></i>
Teacher	<i>Was I <b>WALKING, SPRINTING SKIPPING</b></i>
Students	<i><b>RUNNING, I was RUNNING</b></i>
Teacher	<i>Good! From my brother and his <b>FRIEND</b> or <b>FRIENDS</b>?</i>

Figure 4.1 Grouping Vocabulary and Morphemes (Plural)

Teacher	<i>from my <b>MOTHER, FATHER, SISTER.</b></i>
Students	<i><b>BROTHER</b></i>
Teacher	<i>Oh, it was with his <b>BROTHER</b>, I see. And his <b>FRIEND</b> or <b>FRIENDS</b>?</i>
Students	<i>‘SSSSSS’, ‘S’ with his <b>FRIENDS.</b></i>

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Figure 4.2 Grammar (The language form)

Conjunction + Pronoun + Verb + Noun + Pronoun + Verb + Pronoun + Noun

When At the time	I he she	was	six-years-old sixteen-years-old sixty-years-old eighteen-years-old forty-eight-years-old young / younger	I he she	broke tore injured hurt	my	leg arm wrist neck finger nail
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To highlight different parts of the grammatical structure, provide students with the form of the language. As seen in the Figure 4.2 example of different pronouns (I) + verbs (broke) pronouns (my) + leg (noun). In many classroom situations, an anticipated problem with teaching this grammar would be if students never got injured when they were children. In Figure 4.3, Student 2 is an example of when a student has not experienced any injuries. Having a teacher provide support here is crucial. Vygotsky (1978) insists students can learn more with their support. He coined the term “Zone of Proximal Development”, which points out the learner can achieve more with support from a professional teacher. This process is referred to as “scaffolding”, similar to being on the outside of a building as it is getting repaired. In the case students are frustrated, teachers can always refer to Google translator, seen in Figure 4.6. However, this should be a last resort.

This grammar is relatively straight forward. Nevertheless, some grammatical groups provides challenges. A popular technique for teaching grammatical form is backward drilling in choral command. For example: *Leg, my leg, broke my leg, I broke my leg, six-years-old broke my leg, was six years old I broke my leg, I was six years old I broke my leg* and finally, when I was six years old I broke my leg.

Figure 4.3 Student extension task

Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <i>When I was eleven years old, I broke my leg.</i></li> <li>· <i>When I was thirty-eight years old, I tore my achilles tendon.</i></li> </ul>
Student 1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <i>When I was sixteen years old, I broke my finger.</i></li> <li>· <i>When I was seventeen years old, I broke my wrist.</i></li> </ul>
Student 2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <i>When I was a child, I never broke anything.</i></li> </ul>

Figure 4.4 pronunciation transcripts

Part A. IPA British transcript' / wen aɪ wɒz sɪks jɪəz əʊld, aɪ brəʊk maɪ leg /
Part B. Dictionary.com IPA transcript / wen ahy woz siks yeers ohld, ahy brohk mahy leg /

Figure 4.5 Stressed and Connected


<p>When I was <b>SIX</b>-years-old I <b>BR</b>oke <b>MY</b> leg.          I was <b>RUN</b>ning from <b>My</b> <b>BR</b>other and his <b>FR</b>riends.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p>
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Figure 4.6 Translation into Japanese

English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <i>When I was six years old I broke my leg.</i></li> <li>· <i>I was running from my brother and his friends.</i></li> </ul>
Japanese Translation	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>・ 6歳の頃 足を折ったんだ</li> <li>・ 兄さんとその友達から逃げていたら</li> </ul>

Looking at the pronunciation of this lyric referred to in linguistic terms as ‘prosody’, there are different ways to analyze it. This versification metric can be in either United States pronunciation or in case of Figure 4.4 Part A, the British English transcript. Unless students are familiar with The International

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Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) then an alternative is to use the online dictionary for translation into the sound of spoken English. Each word has been individually translated to create the Figure 4.4 Part B. Looking at Figure 4.5, the stress of the words has been placed in bold and capitalized. Additionally, ‘my brother’ as well as ‘his friends’ are connecting words. The teacher can use their thumb and index finger to show words connecting. Thornbury (2002) suggests many styles of teaching pronunciation, which include sentence stress, syllables, connected-speech, sounds and intonation. Farnselow (1976) insists language instructors should scrutinize and explores methods through unconventional teaching methods. In doing so, using modern technology, changing the YouTube playing speed is one method, the writer has used with mixed results. Otherwise, assisting with more or less information changes the dynamic of the activity.

Figure 4.7 Teaching on YouTube with an Overhead Projector

<b>Sequence</b>
<i>1. Pre listening activity: Singers background, Fashion, Genre, How many hits on YouTube? Students write a premade puzzle by the teacher. For example: W..n l w.s .... y... o.. l ..... m. l..</i>
<i>2. Task: Choose whether to watch the whole song or part of the film clip. Repeat watching the fragment at least 3 or 4 times. iPads have a touch screen mechanism so the user can skip back or forward 8 seconds. This is practical for the teacher, if the device is on an overhead projector.</i>
<i>3. Scaffold the puzzle. Fill in parts as students call out the answer. Alternatively, write the answer down.</i>
<i>4. Paired or group check. The teacher provides hints to support understanding.</i>
<i>5. The answer is given. Always play the specific area of study again once or twice. Students cement their leaning.</i>

## **5. Areas for Future Inquiry and Issues Arising from this Study**

In the future, quantitative research on the impact on motivation would be beneficial for curriculum developers. Textbook writer, may also be influenced to incorporate music into the designs of their materials. Furthermore, a comparative study with a textbook such as English Firsthand Success would be ideal. This series uses a formula for vocabulary building, conversation practice, grammar focus and real stories. Those themes are supported by relatively unknown actors with animated designs. Whereas, incorporating other forms of film and print media into lessons would also be constructive. For example, The Late Late Show with James Corden has segments called ‘Carpool Karaoke’. He has special guests which include Ed Sheeran himself, Paul McCartney and the former First Lady of the United States of America Michelle Obama driving around singing songs. Musicians featuring in movies are increasingly popular in recent times with Lady Gaga starring in the remake of ‘A Star is Born’. Bringing musical idols into ESL practice appears to be advantageous for adults in similar ways to nursery rhymes are for children. Finally, collecting data from students will uncover new ideas for deeper understanding of pop music in the English curriculum and how that could create learning inside and outside of the classroom.

## **6. Conclusion**

Deconstructing a part of a lyric has a place in the classroom for language learners, although, it has not been adopted as a core academic approach to higher education. In the future, alternative forms of education along with electronic devices appears logical. As they are a natural part of our existence in



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the electronic age. From the three universities involved in learning through pop music, it would be to the language instructor's benefit to incorporate music with the lexical approach. However, in the case students do not take the time to learn the meaning, grammar and pronunciation then they are not going to remember much about the English lyrics. Hence, the reasoning teachers use it as an ice-breaker or way to extend the class after motivation has been lost. With the abundance of online information for students to access, facilitators will need to keep up to date with the current trends and make them part of their lessons.

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- Online converter of English text to IPA phonetic transcription  
<https://tophoneics.com/>
- Youtube:

Ed Sheeran - Castle On The Hill [Official Video] Uploaded on 23 January, 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0ibBPhiaG0>

Translation :

Ed Sheeran - Castle on the Hill 歌詞と和訳と解説 Uploaded on 9 February, 2017

<http://cafe.takat33.com/2017/02/castle-on-the-hill-ed-sheeran.html>

## **Pop Music Lyrics**

### **—An Alternative Guide to Teaching English for University Students—**

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This study will focus on achieving higher levels of engagement in university English Second Language classrooms. Though alternative approaches other than the textbook, students have the opportunity to learn about pop culture. More precisely, focusing on the use of English lyrics as an effective method in promoting motivation as well as an understanding of language. In recent times, young people turn to YouTube for entertainment without being prompted or encouraged. Therein, it would be a good idea to incorporate Western music into English studies. Learners can select their favourite hits on the pop charts for analyzing and understanding. In this particular research, Ed Sheeran song “Castle on the hill” has been selected with two sentences being deconstructed. Students will be encouraged to master those two sentences and use them in various situations.

Keywords: pop music, alternative classes, ESL