

## **The Impact of Musical Component on Vocabulary Acquisition (Using the Blues and Jazz as Musical Tools)**

**George Shaduri**

*Faculty of Humanities*

*International Black Sea University, Georgia*

Contact:george.shaduri@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

The teaching method of suggestopaedia, which originated in the 1970s owing to the efforts of Bulgarian psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov, has already been applied in the framework of studies dealing with ELT. In practice the method consists of several stages, the central of which represents intonation reading against appropriate musical background. Unconscious or not fully conscious psychical activity linked to the concept of “concert pseudo-passivity” is critical at that stage. There have been a number of studies conducted in Georgia with the use of this method.

This paper is a modest attempt to contribute to this relatively new and exciting field of pedagogy. The author conceived to conduct the experiment, while using 20<sup>th</sup> century music during the phase of concert pseudo-passivity. It should be mentioned that suggestopaedia generally uses classical music to create the concert pseudo-passivity. The author, however, experimented with two genres of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: blues and jazz. Thus, the experiment was broken down into two parts.

In the first part, the author investigated whether applying blues poetry as means for intonation reading, combined with the blues music as an audio-mirror of the read verse, influences the degree of acquisition of the vocabulary at the advanced level. This yielded positive results allowing further investigation in the area.

In the second part of the experiment, the author conducted twelve academic sessions, of which eight (8) went on to use traditional ways of teaching

vocabulary, and four (4) were done with the elements of suggestopaedia, with the use of jazz music. The experiment has proven that with the use of suggestopaedia, the academic outcome of the students increased by 20%, which can definitely be qualified as methodological success that should be used as an auxiliary tool in the course of teaching.

### **The Impact of Musical Component on Vocabulary Acquisition (Using the Blues and Jazz as Musical Tools)**

Methods of teaching of vocabulary vary. Every year and decade brings and reveals new, efficient ways of helping in acquisition of new lexical units. They range from providing visual aids for visual learners to increasing the degree of perception through touching for tactile learners. One interesting tool, helping to enhance acquisition of a learner, is musical background, a study of which the impact on learning has gradually been expanding.

In 1970, Bulgarian psychologist Georgi Lozanov published a landmark work *Suggestology and Suggestopaedia*, in which he discussed some newly discovered methods of helping learners acquire new information. The term “suggestopaedia” proceeds from Latin *suggestio* (suggesting, inspiring), and *paideia* (teaching, tutoring), and means “teaching through suggesting” (Комлев, 2006). Lozanov talks about various aspects of influencing the brain to absorb material faster and more efficiently. He says, in particular, that “unobtrusive humaneness, harmony of forms and colors, language of music, rhyme, and rhythm fascinate and captivate human personality by much shorter path than the logic of facts and reasons, and reach not only heart, but also brain of the human” (Гегечкори, 1975, p. 118).

According to Lozanov, the majority of currently existing definitions of “suggesting” imply the presence of an unconscious or not fully conscious psychical activity, which makes many authors carry out

investigations studying the unconscious psychical activity of the human, which reveals the essence of suggesting.

In Georgia, suggestopaedia was applied for the first time in the early 1970s for the Intensive Course of Teaching of Foreign Language in the Laboratory of New Methods of Tbilisi State University. It included a number of stages, among which were:

- Introduction: a) Preliminary Testing, aimed at revealing elementary linguistic abilities of learners; b) Introductory Conversation; c) “Entry Niveau” (fixation of the starting level of knowledge, which assumes two types of control – audio-visual, and purely audio);
- Session of Memorization
- Session Development.

During the Session of Memorization the loading of information occurs, whereas during the Session Development the instructor stimulates the delivery (production) of the result.

The Session of Memorization includes:

1. Presentation of new information by the instructor (this can be new words, new phrases, or new situations);
2. Intonation Reading (the instructor reads a text, while the phrases read are shown on screen by a projector);
3. Musical Session.

During the Musical Session, the instructor initially offers the students to relax, sit comfortably, and imagine themselves to be situated in a musical hall where they will listen to symphonic music. First, the instructor turns on the recording, and lets the learners listen to introductory music, which aims at tuning the listeners in, bring them to the condition of so-called “concert pseudo-passivity”. Then, the instructor reduces the volume of musical background and starts reading the text. As Gegechkori underlines, “one should constantly hearken to the music, consider the character of its sounding, and try to add emotion to the phrase read, which corresponds to

the mood, brought about by musical background. It is not less important to find appropriate rhythm of reading of foreign phrases. With this regard one also should stick to the rhythm, embedded in the music, trying not to deviate from it during the reading” (Гегечкори, 1975, p. 186-187).

Music takes particular significance during the teaching of foreign languages, in particular, foreign speech, since there is connection between music and speech, based on common acoustic and expressive components (rhythm, melody, volume, dynamics, and stress). In this way, rhythm is considered as an internal organization of images, perceived by a person and serving as the basis for his actions. The studies showed that a person is inclined to adopt rhythmical pattern, which partly explains fast memorization of learning material in the form of a song-drill (Бухбиндер, Китайгородская, 1988).

In 1998-2002, in Georgia, a pedagogical experiment regarding the impact of music and its rhythm on the improvement of learning efficiency was completed as part of the dissertation entitled *Teaching English on Musical-Rhythmical Basis in Elementary School* by Nino Sakvarelidze. The experimental teaching was conducted for one academic year 5 times a week in the groups consisting of 10 learners. The text of the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* as well as rhythmical game situations served as a material for the experimental teaching. At the same time, the unity of rhythmical movements followed the rhythm of speech, the purpose being to solve learning tasks based on rhythm of “rap” music. It was assumed that introduction of musical-rhythmical components in the offered methodology would increase the efficiency of mastering of English language by the learners of elementary forms (6-8 years). As a part of the experimental teaching, the instructor was reading the fairy tale and showing pictures from the tale against musical background with accompanying gestures, rhythm, and intonation. As the children did not have any speech skills in English language prior to the course of study, the explorer estimated the dynamics of formation of speech habits by

comparing the degree of linguistic and speech habits of the children in English after one month of the course and at the end of the course. The results of the experiment showed that if at the beginning of the course the speech and musical-rhythmical habits of the children were not distinguished at all, or were quite poor, then by the end of the course these habits would be remarkably improved. As Sakvarelidze states, “Musical compositions as a source of speech actualize the vocabulary of learners, their intellectual activity also increases, musical rhythm contributes to development of speech habits of children (Сакварелидзе, 2006).

On the basis of suggestopaedia, Professor Kitaygorodskaya developed the Method of Intensive Teaching of Foreign Languages (ИО), which pays due attention to the musical component. Functional music of this method is divided into activating (used before the beginning of the course to activate cognitive functions of learners) and relaxing (used during relaxation or concert sessions as music accompanying slides). Both of these types of music are used as background music, which is called “programmatic music”. Programmatic music represents music-symbol or music of particular content. It is used as a signature tune (theme song) to tune the learners in before or during the fulfillment of a task, enhancing the motivation of communicative task. Experience shows that for the creation of such a background instrumental music is more preferable than that of a song. Fulfillment of tasks against musical background is one of the features of ИО. Background during communication in a foreign language does not hinder efficient work of the brain; on the contrary, it activates it (Бухбиндер, Китайгородская, 1988, p. 306).

Application of music during lessons contributes to emotional relaxation of the learners, which even regulates their emotional state. By listening to the music of the country of the language to be learned, the learners deepen their knowledge regarding the culture of this country. While learning and performing the songs in a foreign language, the students have the opportunity to learn some traditions and facts from the history of the country of the language to be learned (Бухбиндер,

Китайгородская, 1988). This is what Gegechkori and Sakvarelidze call the “authenticity” of the cultural background as expressed via authentic musical background, against which the linguistic material to be mastered is set.

On the basis of the above, the author of this article created his own case study. He took the methodology of suggestopaedia as the basis of his experiment, supported by already existing experiments, and modified it in accordance with the specificity of his original research.

## **Methods**

### **Experiment 1**

The hypothesis of the author can be summarized as follows: the learners of English can master new vocabulary more efficiently if, after presentation of new stock of words and intonation reading of a relevant text containing these words they will read this text against musical background culturally connected with this text. The type of text and music used for this purpose were respectively blues poetry and blues music.

The experiment assumed working with two different groups of students in their freshman year of studies at the Faculty of Humanities with English as a working language. One of these groups was given experimental status (including 11 participants), another was attributed the control status (12 participants). With the experimental group the author followed all the three stages of suggestopaedia mentioned above.

First, the preliminary testing of linguistic abilities of the two groups was conducted, which, on the one hand, revealed that their knowledge of the language was nearly the same and, on the other hand, corresponded to upper-intermediate level.

Introductory Conversation (followed by the “Entry Niveau”), which lasted two academic hours, was offered only to the experimental group and included providing the students with basic knowledge about what jazz music is, including the information about the main stages of its development together with the audio examples of corresponding trends and key performers. Here it was specified that the blues represent the core component of jazz music, and the review of different streams of jazz were carried out through examples of the tunes written in the form of the 12-bar blues. Thus, the students of the experimental group had the advantage against those of the control one in terms of basic understanding of specificity of the genre of blues.

The Session of Memorization, which lasted one academic hour, followed the same pattern in both groups, but differed in one (the last) part. In both groups 13 lexical items corresponding to the advanced level of knowledge, and, therefore, unknown to both groups, were taken from different blues poems of Langston Hughes and presented to both groups (stage 1). This was followed by Intonation Reading, in which the instructor read the corresponding stanzas from blues poems containing those lexical items (stage 2). Here the students encountered the form, as well as rhythm and rhyme of blues poetry, which was underlined by the reader (the instructor) to the best way possible. Finally, there was the last part – Musical Session (stage 3), to which the experimental group was exposed, but to which the control group was not. Musical Session presented the lines of blues stanzas (a 12-bar blues stanza has three lines), one by one, accompanied by specially selected instrumental piece of the 12-bar blues, which, along with melodic and improvised line, had steady swinging rhythm set by drums. Each line of blues stanza appeared on the screen against the background of 4 musical bars, divided by the rhythm. By the time each musical chorus (12 bars) expired, the students had read all three lines of a stanza on the screen. The new lexical items appearing in stanzas were highlighted with red colour to mark their presence, thus alerting students’ to better focus on them.

The Session of Development (eliciting the degree of acquired information) was carried out one week after the experiment. The students were tested on the degree of memorization of the vocabulary learned. The results showed that while in total the control group students identified correctly 98 out of 143 lexical items (68%), the experimental group students identified correctly 124 out of 156 lexical items (79%). Thus, this particular experiment has proved that Musical Session, which is linked with the Introductory Conversation, ensures better results provided that all other conditions are equal.

An important assumption, which can follow this experiment, is that the authenticity of musical component, i.e. its integrated nature regarding the textual (poetic) constituent of the experiment, is vital in terms of increasing the efficiency of the acquired material. However, this assumption still needs further research in this interesting and exciting area of pedagogy.

## **Experiment 2**

According to Professor Kitaygorodskaya, at the present stage, the teaching of foreign language cannot be isolated from the socio-cultural context, in which it is used. Consequently, the knowledge of the context is not less important than the knowledge of the language. Paradoxically, the teaching of foreign language as a programmatic objective yields the place to the new approach dictated by social order of present times. This approach expands the formula of the objectives of teaching – not only mastering the language as a means of verbal and written communication, but also as the language as means of familiarization with other cultures (Китайгородская, 1990).

According to Professor Kolchinskaya, during the mastering of methodology of intensive training, the requirements for the pedagogue significantly increase, which is both significant and essential. The method of activation of opportunities of personality and team, except for



knowledge of the language and correct mastership of the method, put additional requirements to the pedagogue not as desirable, but as necessary ones. These are benevolence, democracy, reserve, and correctness towards people, not to mention artistry, certain musicality, creative talent and inventiveness (Колчинская, 1990).

One year following the first experiment, the author conducted another experiment to 1) confirm the results obtained during the first experiment; and 2) link the methodology of suggestopaedia with cultural context associated with musical session. The group with which the experiment was conducted consisted of 10 freshmen students. The experiment lasted one (winter) academic semester. During 10 academic sessions (three academic hours each) the students were taught vocabulary without using any methodology of suggestopaedia, and the results were reflected in two midterm exams. The last four academic sessions were conducted with the use of elements of suggestopaedia: the students were told to imagine that they were sitting in a jazz club, the lights were extinguished and the projector light created a specific club atmosphere. Smooth and relaxing piano jazz accompanied the presentation of new vocabulary, doing vocabulary drills, and demonstration of visual aids.

#### Session 1.

- *Pseudo-concert passivity* was ensured by presentation of unknown words through sentences with a background of ragtime music.
- Drills
- Visual aids
- Role-play: the teacher made the following statement: “I am a Hollywood director. You are cartoonists. I am going to hire some of you for my company. Please, invent sentences with the words learnt to describe your cartoon”.
- Students tell their sentences

### Session 2.

- *Pseudo-concert passivity*: presentation of the new vocabulary from “A Mystery of Heroism” by Stephen Crane with the background of the blues played by combo-bands.
- Drills
- Visual aids
- Role play: teacher’s statement: “You are to be recruited to the army for the first time in your life, not as soldiers but as inspectors. You will be paid a lot for your job, which is part-time. Please, use the given words to say to the commanders, what is WRONG in the unit/regiment you serve”.
- Students tell their sentences

### Session 3.

- *Pseudo-concert passivity*: presentation of the new vocabulary from “A Visit of Charity” by Eudora Welty with the background of the blues played by combo-bands.
- Drills
- Visual aids
- Role-play: teacher’s statement: “You are recruited by YMCA for charity activities. You have three options to decide where to work. These are:
  - Old men’s house
  - Orphanage
  - Hospital

Using TWO words from the slide, choose ONE option and explain why it is attractive to you.”

- Students tell their sentences

### Session 4.

- *Pseudo-concert passivity*: presentation of the new vocabulary from “The Black Ball” by Ralph Ellison under the background of the jazz played by Bill Evans’ band.
- Drills
- Visual aids
- Role-play: teacher’s statement: “Imagine you are
  - Teachers
  - Psychologists
  - Charity workers

Your company sent you to work with young African American immigrants. In one or two sentences, tell what is the most common cultural problem you met in your group.”

- Students tell their sentences.

## **Conclusion**

These 4 experimental academic sessions resulted in the final exam, which showed significant improvement of student performance in the section of vocabulary. After the first and second midterm exams the coefficients of successful performance were 0.66 and 0.63 respectively; after the final exam the coefficients rose to 0.80, showing an almost 20% improvement. Thus, the result is clear. Skillfully using of jazz music while teaching vocabulary improves overall performance, which once again confirms that suggestopaedia is a useful and successfully applied modern technology of teaching.

## References

- Бухбиндер, В., Китайгородская, Г. (1988). *Методика интенсивного обучения иностранным языкам*. Издательство «Выцашкола», Киев.
- Гегечкори, Л. (1975). *К проблеме интенсификации процесса обучения взрослых иноязычной речи*. Издательство Тбилисского университета. Тбилиси.
- Китайгородская, Г. А. (1990). *Новые подходы к обучению иностранным языкам*. Москва. Издательство Московского университета.
- Колчинская, Е. В. (1990). *«Интенсив»: цель или средство?»* Москва. Издательство Московского университета.
- Комлев, Н. (2006). *Словарь иностранных слов*. Retrieved from <http://www.inslov.ru/html-komlev/s/suggestopedi8.html> on 04.15.2012.
- Сакварелидзе, Н. (2006). *Обучение английскому языку на музыкально-ритмической основе в начальных классах*. Автореферат диссертации, представленной на соискание учёной степени кандидата педагогических наук. Тбилиси.