

Rhythm, Chants, Verse, and Song in Oral Language Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the practical uses of rhythm in chants, verse, and song in primitive and modern cultures. Seeing that these are not simply popular folk art forms but rather effective, not to mention pleasant, means of retaining and passing on information, we look into how they might be used more effectively in the English language classroom.

Introduction

Getting language students to remember what one has taught them has always been a difficult challenge. Straight memorization is never a pleasant task, but can be made more palatable, if not enjoyable, with an appropriate vehicle. Here, the power of rhythm, chant, and song is probably underestimated and certainly under-utilized in teaching spoken language.

Preliterate cultures have always made use of rhythmic and melodic structure as devices to hold and transmit important information when writing was non-existent. The writer's own experiences with chant and poetry in various languages and cultures, both literate and preliterate, provide specific and personal examples of the power of oral tradition.

These ancient devices thrive even in our modern, technological civilization, although we may have little consciousness of their effectiveness. Some language teachers have tapped into this primitive vein of human psychology to develop an entire style of teaching.

This is closer to the task of teaching everyday English conversation than might be immediately apparent. Intonation/melody and especially rhythm place extremely rigid demands on proper and native-like pronunciation. Language-learning is of course more than vocabulary and grammar; in spoken language, a coordinated mastery of mental and physical skills is called for. Rhythm in song, chant, and poem are useful in teaching these skills effectively. Popular culture can also be exploited to transmit these skills and promote a pleasant association with language-learning.

Memories and Memory

“No, no, my melodies will never die,
While nurses sing, or babies cry.”

—Mother Goose, 1833¹

In the 1960s and 1970s, thanks to the United States Peace Corps and later Hawaii's East-West Center, I was fortunate enough to be able to live not only in another country but also in another age.

From 1967 to 1970 I lived on on Fais Island and then in 1976 on Satawal Island in Micronesia, a chain of tiny² islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean also known as the Western Caroline Islands. They are located slightly north of the Equator, east of the Philippines and south of Guam and Saipan. Even to this day one can still find what is largely a Stone Age culture, with radios, tape recorders, Walkmans, motorboats and other technological marvels giving a late twentieth century veneer.

Our seven-week Peace Corps/Micronesia training program was being held for the first time in Truk, and it was here that I came up against a radically new (to me) but actually very ancient form of learning. A couple of weeks into language training, wanting to review and do some extra study, I asked Gatalemwar, my

native - speaker instructor in Woleaian (a Carolinian language) if I could see the textbook being used for language training.

He replied, Faal pejemw, mawej, nge ye tewai mmwel, "I'm sorry, sir, but that's impossible." Being the American that I was, I kept after him, demanding to know why. Finally, a little exasperated, he explained, Bwe yetoor babyorol kkapetal Woleai, "There IS no Woleaian textbook," and furthermore that he was not sure how to write anything down even if he had to. Not only were there no textbooks, he claimed, there was not even any writing system, Yetoor A - B - C.

"So how do you remember things?" I asked, and he replied, "When you have no paper, no pencils, and no writing system, you can't afford to forget.

"The trouble with you modern folks is that you have all these things, so you write everything down and hope the paper will remember for you. You don't use your ears and mind. You don't really listen and so you don't hear. And your unexercised mind forgets so much, and if the paper should be lost. . . . You had better start learning in the island way, young man."

From then on, having little other choice, I resorted to "When in Rome" thinking and shifted my language learning to mostly unwritten form. Almost three decades later, Gatalemwar's words are constantly with me as I apply them in every English class I teach. I do not hand out written material very often and use it as little as possible even when I do. I often have doubts how much my students can remember, but I do know that if they don't use their ears and minds, these organs will remain flaccid and useless.

Encyclopedic Memories

When I arrived on Fais in late 1967, I found that quite a few Japanese words had been borrowed into the language (dengwa 'telephone,' riyaka 'cart,' kanggof 'nurse,' kachido 'movie, to show off,' etc. Although Japanese administration of these islands ended with the war in 1945, children were still singing songs learned from their parents and grandparents, who had learned them in their own childhoods

decades earlier. My students would sing:

Momotarô - san! Momotarô - san!
O - koshi ni tsuketa kibidango
Hitotsu watashi ni kudasai na!

But this was a minor accomplishment. Even after adapting to life in an oral culture, I was astounded to learn just how much these people could remember — accurately. After two years on Fais speaking Ulithian, a language related to Woleaian, I was accidentally stranded on Satawal Island when the captain of the ship suddenly sailed off in a huff after a fight with the field-trip officer. I had nothing at all with me except the loincloth I was wearing, and Satawalese was yet another, related language I suddenly was forced to learn, but it was my introduction to a most remarkable group of people.

On Satawal and nearby islands like Puluwat and Pulusuk are found probably the last people in the world who still practice long-distance oceanic navigation. In Polynesia it was people like these, perhaps Samoans 2000 years ago, who sailed 3400 km. east to the Marquesas, and a thousand years later to Easter Island, Hawaii, Tahiti, and New Zealand.

The remarkable thing is that all this voyaging over thousands of kilometers of trackless ocean was done without compasses or any other instruments. They used only their powers of observation and association, and their memories, to retain this priceless information and to hand it down over the generations. But now in Polynesia and Melanesia, the old navigators are no more. People sail, but generally stay close to land. In Satawal, Puluwat, and Pulusuk, however, they still sail in this manner, aboard traditional outrigger canoes, and the tradition continues to be passed on.

In his book, We, the Navigators: the ancient art of landfinding in the Pacific, New Zealander David Lewis, himself a western navigator, describes with awe the feat carried off by his instructor, that of sailing in the traditional way from Puluwat to

Saipan and back, a 900 km. voyage each way.

The demonstration voyages of the Puluwat (Carolinian) navigator Hipour were of a rather special character, in that the latest canoe journey from the Carolines to the Marianas appears to have been made around 1905 [Lewis notes, writing in 1972].....

Hipour, like most of his highly trained contemporaries, is illiterate, his vast store of learning being entirely memorised. The Saipan sailing directions that he knew must have been handed down orally for at least sixty - four years, or two or three generations, since last put into practice...³

It is not enough to say that Lewis's navigator, Hipour, was illiterate, for a language can exist in written form but its speakers be unable to read or write it. Such is increasingly the sad case of English in the United States⁴. In Hipour's case, as I learned in Peace Corps training, there existed nothing to be literate about. Yet, the "vast store of learning" that a Carolinian navigator must master, and not forget lest he lose his own life and those of his crew, would be worthy of a doctorate. Or more. And Hipour had held this knowledge, unapplied, in his head for years, as had his father, grandfather, and probably great - grandfather.

One of many areas of knowledge consists of wofanu, or directions concerning the star courses between various islands and these, including variations covering differing weather and sea conditions, are almost too numerous to count. In The Last Navigator, Stephen D. Thomas lists some 180 wofanu by name, and this is surely only a partial list.

Supplementing the wofanu system is pookof, which Thomas defines as "a navigational system which gives star courses and ranges [distances] to distinct and identifiable birds, fishes, whales, and reefs arrayed around each island." There are numerous other systems, including those that describe seaways between islands, methods for sighting islands, and celestial weather forecasting.

Other esoteric knowledge is conveyed by itang, a style of speech and a somewhat

poetic form of oral literature used for guidance in (among other things) navigation, magic, warfare, and management of human relations.

In what form, then, do navigators memorize and, more importantly, permanently retain all this knowledge, which, I reiterate, does not exist in any written form and is forgotten or misremembered at the probable cost of one's life?

Surely, simply to memorize such extensive, complex, and critical material as a random collection of facts, by brute force as if memorizing an encyclopedia would be too daunting a task. The task is not to regurgitate the material on a test paper, as I am sure we have all done, only to forget it the moment the test is over.

The form most commonly used is the NAVIGATION CHANT. A very simple and basic chant goes:

I sit on Satawal,
I go rising Mailap to Truk.
I sit on Truk,
I go setting Mailap on Satawal. . .⁵

Mailap (the constellation Aquila "The Eagle" in English and Washi-Za in Japanese) passes almost directly over the Caroline Islands and is one of the main navigational constellations. To go from Satawal to Truk, one sails for the rising position of Mailap on the eastern horizon; the basic course for the reciprocal journey, from Truk to Satawal, is determined by the setting position of Mailap on the western horizon⁶.

Thomas describes the range of navigation chants:

Chants cover every exigency of voyaging. There were chants to remove certain taboos. . . . chants to counteract sickness on distant islands, even chants to soothe whales threatening to destroy a canoe⁷.

My year on Satawal in 1976 was not to research navigation, so I did not learn any navigation chants. In Peace Corps training in Truk, though, I had been taught a very simple work chant.

On the last day of training, each group was asked to do some small presentation for the farewell ceremony. Our teacher, Gatalemwar, decided that we should do something special to show Woleaian respect for tradition, so he named me chanter and taught me an old but still used “hauling” chant. It was used to haul canoes onto the beach or when a school of garangap (Engl. bonito, Jpnse. katsuo) came into the lagoon. Canoes would go out with long nets and circle the school. Then, everyone on the whole island would join in hauling in the net, which, water-logged and filled with thousands of garangap, would weigh several tons.

The chant served to synchronize the pulling effort. The leader would chant Weikemwu, weikemwu! and everyone else would simultaneously pull on the ropes and shout in repetition Weikemwu!

<u>Chanter/Leader</u>	<u>Others</u>
Weikemwu, weikemwu!	Weikemwu!
Weikemwu kemaani!	Kemaani!
Kema - ha - ni yemaawo!	Yemaawo!
Yema - ha - wo yerimidiwa!	Yerimidiwa!
Yerimidiwa yuraadage!	Yuraadage!!

I asked Gatalemwar what the words meant and he admitted that he himself did not really know, except for the last word Yuraadage! ‘Haul it up!’ According to Thomas, this is sometimes the case with navigation chants too, since the language and pronunciation, particularly in itang, tend to be archaic. It does not matter, though, whether all the words are understood as long as the main information is understood. It is enough that the rest provide the supporting matrix to carry that information.

As a way to facilitate entry into the local culture, our act was a great hit. My

classmates circled a section of the audience as our garangap to be “hailed in” to the stage area. People from related island groups joined in and cheered us on, recalling, it seems, when such chants had once been used long ago on their islands too. By the time I got to Yap, 1500 km. away, word had already preceded me that I was the American kid who could do the Weikemwu chant. Our first night in Yap at our welcoming party, we were asked by the Yap legislature to perform the chant again. After a couple more performances on Fais, in late 1967, as my vocal contribution to a couple of feasts, I have had no occasion to use the chant but performing it today would be no more difficult than a childhood nursery rhyme.

Interludes: Playing and Remembering

For several years now in Japan, I have enjoyed using songs and nursery rhymes to provide a break in my lessons. I call these breaks Interludes⁸. Latin inter -, of course, means ‘between’; -lude can be interpreted as deriving from ludus ‘(humorous) play,’ in the sense of a dramatic piece, but in this sense of Interlude, we go back to the verb form ludere ‘to play, frolic, engage in sportive behavior.’ Since my conversation classes can be quite demanding — too demanding, I’m sure some students would say — I like to offer a change of pace from time, while still keeping the focus on language - learning.

An Interlude might take the form of a one - hour class taught exclusively in the Hawaiian language. Why Hawaiian in an English conversation class? One reason, as I mentioned, is simply to provide a change of pace. Another reason is that I hope to show the students, indirectly, that no matter how poor they think their ability to speak English is, it is still a lot better than their ability to speak Hawaiian; so take heart!

A third reason is to give them a “hands - on” experience in learning a language strictly via the aural - oral, or “direct” method from the very first minute of class. This forces them to depend strictly on their ears and their memory. As they stand there, expectantly but unsuspectingly, I greet them, not with “Good morning! How

are you?" but with Aloha kakahiaka kâkou! Pehea 'oe? And so it goes for the next hour. Even I am often surprised at how, years later, some students will remember bits and pieces of Hawaiian that they learned solely by ear in a single 60-minute period.

The Hawaiian language Interlude in its entirety is a roundabout prelude to a Hawaiian song Lahaina Luna, and since this song is in English, it brings the day's activities back to the language of study. As a song — and a Hawaiian song at that, with all its exotic images — it is an enjoyable way to wind up classes before summer vacation.

I started doing the Hawaiian language lesson/Lahaina Luna classes years ago while teaching for Kawaguchi Gakuen at Waseda Sokki Gakkô in Takadanobaba. I understand that, later, some of those students remembered Lahaina Luna and sang it while sightseeing by bus in parts of Europe. I met another former student while I was working in a lodge at the summit of Mt. Fuji one summer, and she too remembered the song. That night, at 3776 meters, we sat around the charcoal bucket, warming ourselves, drinking beer — and singing Lahaina Luna. Surely, it was one of the strangest places the song has ever been sung.

Although I assume that along the way my students acquired some skill at dealing with spoken English in live situations, it has often simultaneously vexed and amused me that they seem to remember nothing we did during the entire school year, or two years as the case may be, in my English conversation classes, except some of the Hawaiian phrases and especially Lahaina Luna.

But upon reflection, I realized that my own experiences were very similar, which bespeaks the impact of the direct method and of rhythm and song. As a major in Linguistics and German at the University of California at Berkeley, I read a lot of German and much more at Georg-August Universität in Germany, including, of course Goethe. From all that, however, the one thing I remember fairly accurately and indeed with considerable delight is Goethe's poem Erlkönig (Elf King), which we were required to memorize.

I know next to nothing about the technical aspects of poetry (and will leave that

to those who are qualified), but even a novice like me could appreciate the poem's meter, which I found so appropriate. To this day, thirty years later, I can still hear the rhythmic clatter of the horse's hooves in the lines I can recite from memory:

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind.
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

Who rides there so late, through night and wind?
A father it is, a father and child.
He has the boy there, secure in his arm.
He holds him tightly, he holds him warm.

I still get goose - pimples seeing and hearing the father and son dash through the eerie night, the boy seeing ghostly visions in his feverish hallucinations:

“Mein Sohn, warum birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?”
“Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron und Schweif?”
“Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.”

“Du liebes Kind, komm geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir.
Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand ;
Meine Mutter hat manch' gülden Gewand.”

“My son, why do you hide your face so in fear?”
“Don't you see him, the elf king, father dear?
The elf king, with his crown and tail.”
“My son, 'tis but the fog, 'tis but a veil.”

“You, dear child, come go with me!
Very nice games I shall play with thee!
Many pretty flowers, they cover the shore;
Golden garments has my mother, and more!”⁹

We also had to study Latin and from that class the Pater Noster (The Lord’s Prayer) —and very little else —remains with me to this day.

Pater noster, qui es in caelis,
Sanctificetur nomen tuum.
Adveniat regnum tuum.
Fiat voluntas tua,
sicut in caelo, et in terra. . . .

Our Father, Who art in Heaven,
Hallowèd be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in Heaven....

Another classical language that linguistics students were required to study was Sanskrit, and here too I remember nothing, except the opening line to a poem about a heroic King Nala:

Asid râja, Nalo nama, virasenasuto bali,
Upapanno gunair istair rupâvan, ashvakovidah¹⁰.

A partial and approximate translation is: “There was a king, by the name of Nala, brave and strong with many horses.” Although these two lines are not far from being merely nonsense syllables to me, I doubt that I will ever forget them: the words and their rhythm is too indelibly imprinted in my mind and oral musculature.

Rhythmic Devices in Media Commercials

Those in the world of TV and radio commercials are no strangers to the power of song, chant, and rhythm, for they are only too well aware of the seductive power of a cleverly constructed jingle to carry and firmly fix their message in the minds of the audience. With companies' reputations and small fortunes at stake, they are not about to fool around with unproven methods.

In America, I used to associate the Battle Hymn of the Republic with Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, but after years in Japan only Yodobashi Camera comes to mind.

A particularly excellent example in recent years on Japanese TV is a series of memorable and therefore highly successful commercials by 39-year-old Masahiko Satoh. My favorite is:

Bazaar de gozaru,
Bazaar de gozaru,
NEC no mise ni yuku de gozaru.
Oya - baggu, ko - baggu, mago - baggu, himago -
baggu ga ataru de gozaru.
Ato wa kudaru dake de gozaru.
Jinsei, kuereba raku ari de goz -
. . . A - a - a - a - a - ah!

Satoh's success is great but his technique is simple: he relies on little else than rhythm and repetition. An extreme example of this technique is another one of his highly successful oeuvres: a series of beer commercials, in which the humorous visual message is backed up by a jingle consisting of a single key word, repeated rhythmically over and over and over.

Rhythm, Chants, Verse, and Song in Oral Language Instruction

Morutsu, morutsu, morutsu, morutsu!

Morutsu, morutsu, morutsu, morutsu!

—Suntory Malt Beer commercial

Another simple but effective jingle came at the end of each commercial (creator unknown) for a short-term residence hotel, giving us the telephone number and name in an easily remembered way:

Yon - yon - maru - maru, wan - wan - wan,

Tsukasa no Weekly Mansion!

But the introduction of 3 at the beginning of many existing Tokyo telephone numbers threatened to render this longstanding jingle useless, for the addition of another syllable or two would upset the rhythm. The problem was confronted, then side-stepped in a simple way:

San no . . .

Yon - yon - maru - maru, wan - wan - wan,

Tsukasa no Weekly Mansion!

Rhythm, Chants, and Songs in the Classroom

Rhythm and Emotion

It does not take the ability to read or perform music (I have extreme difficulty with either) to see how music and rhythm provide an organized, structured framework on which to attach the material or message one is trying to learn or transmit. Who does not have various melodies and rhythms in his or her head, serious or frivolous, from youth and childhood?

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry;
When the boys came out to play,
Georgie Porgie ran away.

—Mother Goose

What is more, there is often considerable emotional content associated with particular music. For those of us who grew up with Elvis Presley, Peter, Paul and Mary, and the Beatles, for example, their music virtually defines that stage of our lives, as do the military songs (gunka) for some of our Japanese elders.

I mentioned above how the rhythmic lines of Erlkönig so effortlessly stimulate visual images and emotional responses. While anyone would consider the poetry of a Goethe or Shakespeare a worthy subject of academic study, it might seem that popular songs, Mother Goose, commercial jingles, and rap music are frivolous activities for a college classroom. But Carolyn Graham, a teacher of English as a Second Language with many years of international experience and a New York University faculty member, has produced a series of texts known collectively as Jazz Chants¹¹ and is well aware of the usefulness of stress patterns (rhythm) and intonation to convey emotion¹². In explaining "How a Jazz Chant Works," she says

The student of Jazz Chanting learns to express feelings through stress and intonation, while building a vocabulary appropriate to the familiar rituals of daily life

The Chants are a reflection of basic human emotions which occur in

specific situations such as *pleasure* at seeing a beloved friend after a long absence, *anger*....., *frustration*....., *anxiety*....., *possessiveness*....., *feeling homesick*....., *pain*....., and a feeling of general *misery*.....¹³

The Demand for Precise, Accurate Execution

Any verse places demands on the speaker/singer that are absolutely unforgiving. Whether it is Goethe's Erlkönig or NEC's Bazaar de gozaru series, the slightest slip or hesitation disrupts the rhythm and flaws the entire performance. This makes all the more remarkable and entertaining the spontaneous performances of Black street-rappers like Perry P. in BBC's documentary series, The Story of English¹⁴.

The "man of words" and his ability to stir the emotions of his audience with his oratory has long been highly respected in Black culture. Perry P. is a descendant of that oral tradition, which includes Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. In the documentary the street-rapper describes his art (purely oral, not written) and, without missing a beat, launches into a rap.

"Well, me myself, I don't write 'em. There's different people that write their raps throughout the city, the state, the world, whatever. I myself, I just make 'em up out of my head as I go along. It might be the streets, it might be war, or somethin' like that. As far as a message rap, this is one, like

Automatic, push - button, remote control!
Synthetics, genetics command your soul!
Trucks, tanks, laser beams,
Guns, blasts, submarines,
Neutron - , B - bomb, A - bomb, gas,
All that stuff will kill you fast!

“Well, as far as makin’ up one, I can do one, like, say, about this building,
like you might say, the buildin’ . . .

The buildin’ is here,
Bricks fall to the ground,
Ya see the home boys all gather around,
See the M.C. rapper, a - sittin’ on the step,
Gettin’ much respect
Because o’ hold the check.
And I’m about to connect
With the funky beat
That make ya get on up
And jump - a outta your seat.
It’s like THIS!

Sources of Difficulty for Japanese Learning English

Much of the difficulty that Japanese learners of English have with comprehending and speaking natural-sounding English has to do with the multitude of changes that words undergo when combined with others and spoken naturally. Graham points out:

American English stretches, shortens, blends and often drops sounds. These subtle features of the language are extremely difficult for a student to comprehend unless his ear has been properly trained. The sound of, “Jeet yet?” is meaningless unless one has acquired the listening comprehension skills necessary to make the connection with, “Did you eat yet?”¹⁵.

Simple, illustrative examples can be found anywhere: in the phrase “for four

years”, the words for and four, in isolation, are identical; yet, in natural speech, they actually sound more like “fur four years.”¹⁶ “This is an orange” comes out like “Thisizunorange”. Sometimes students ask, “Norange? What’s that?”¹⁷

My students are currently struggling to master fluid pronunciation of the sentence “I’m expecting him and his friends in a minute.”¹⁸ With various reductions, dropping of sounds, and the application of liaison, this comes out sounding like “Aimekspektinimuniz frenzina minit,” spoken in perfectly natural, conversational style.

Is it any wonder, then, that after years of dealing with English with each word spoken carefully in unreduced, uncombined form, as if in isolation, they are flabbergasted to hear a sentence like the above? They may be forgiven, I think, if they wonder what new language the teacher has suddenly switched to. Liaison (as in “an orange” connecting to become “anorange”) is responsible for much of this problem. Imagine the confusion in French classes if the language were taught without reference to liaison. Yet we do this in the teaching of English all the time.

However, the situation is not really so bad. While the intricacies of naturally spoken English spoken still pose a great challenge for Japanese speakers (and others!), steady progress has in fact been made. Few students these days have difficulty any more with conversational, reduced phrases such as “I wanna play ” and “I’m gonna study.” How much of this incremental linguistic kaizen, I wonder, began decades ago, perhaps when young Japanese, like the rest of the world, were swept up in the Elvis Presley craze (“I jus’ wanna be yer Teddy Bear”) or the Beatles frenzy (“I wanna holdjer ha - a - nd”).

Although relaxed pronunciation tends to be associated with popular music, leisure, and street-talk, one must never forget that it is also a totally natural, everyday speaking style. It also carries considerable social meaning, although this goes far beyond what we are trying to accomplish in English classes at present.

The simple sentence “I am going to go” can have several levels of reduction: → “I’m going to go” → “I’m goin’ ta go” → “I’m gonna go” → “I’munna go.” English does not have distinct sets of words and affixes that correspond to the social

situation and the relative level of the speakers like Japanese does (omae - kimi - anta - anata - otaku - (sensei, okusan, okaasan, buchô); iu - moshiageru - ossharu, miru - haiken, etc.). But the level of intimacy or formality of a particular situation in English can be identified by the level of reduction in pronunciation as well as by vocabulary. One would not expect the President of the United States to talk like a Los Angeles rock DJ while giving a speech.¹⁹

Introducing “Relaxed” Pronunciation into the Classroom

Where possible, training in “relaxed” or “casual” pronunciation—both in listening and speaking skills—should be introduced into the classroom. This is especially important now that so many students are participating in “study abroad” and “homestay” programs in America and other English-speaking countries. Of course, most of them will learn “relaxed” pronunciation to some extent even if they are simply “dumped” over there and forced to “sink or swim.” Every immigrant has. But it would so much better if they could arrive in America and “hit the ground running”; this means exposure to and, if possible, training in dealing with English as it is normally spoken by native speakers.

However, just to have native English-speaking teachers is not enough, especially because in the classroom, native speakers tend to adjust their pronunciation so that the students can understand them more easily. It is a natural enough human response for facilitating communication. However, to allow such indulgence indefinitely ultimately shortchanges the students. It is like practicing slow-pitch softball, when the actual game will be regular baseball (“hardball”). At some point, especially for students going abroad, relaxed pronunciation must be confronted and mastered. In her textbook for acquiring listening skills in naturally spoken English, Stacy Hagen points out that:

Whether the source be TV, radio, or a casual encounter, students are regularly frustrated by rapid, relaxed speech. Even university-bound

students trained in academic listening are often at a loss when trying to respond to authentic extended discourse²⁰.

Acquisition of “Mechanical” Skills

Fortunately, Hagen’s textbook and others like it have appeared in recent years. These deal specifically with “relaxed” or “casual” pronunciation. The first one I came across was Nina Weinstein’s 1982 text Whaddaya Say? Guided practice in relaxed spoken English. Next was Hagen’s Sound Advice: a basis for listening (1988), which was considerably more detailed and refined. The most recent one is Sound Advantage: a pronunciation book (1992) by Hagen and Patricia E. Grogan. Among the reduction phenomena dealt with in these texts are linking (in an hour → [ɪn ə naʊ ə r]), h-deletion (What’s his name? → [w ə tsɪz neɪ m]), y-assimilation (not yet → [nə t]), and intervocalic t or d reducing to “flap t” or “flap d.”

From Mechanical to Automatic

I want my students to be able to comprehend “relaxed” speech, but I am particularly interested in teaching them to speak this way as well, for I believe that mastery of the active heightens mastery of the passive: if they can say it, then they can understand it when they hear it; but not necessarily vice - versa. One can watch any performance (musical, dance, sports, speaking) and certainly enjoy it, but the fine points of that performance can be perceived and appreciated all the more if one has “been there,” and has actually done the activity oneself.

If possible, I try to have my students practice relaxed pronunciation in an enjoyable way. The first stage, represented by exercises from Whaddaya Say?, Sound Advice, and Sound Advantage, covers the technical and mechanical aspects of relaxed pronunciation. Even this stage often turns out to be fun. The students find learning to speak this way is much like trying to master tongue - twisters, and they laugh at themselves and each other as they awkwardly trip and stumble over

the sentences. At the same time, they usually sense that these are not just exercises in oral dexterity; the skills are critical to surviving in normally spoken English.

Why “Practice Makes Perfect”

As an introduction to relaxed pronunciation, light practice is fine, but to master it, frequency and volume of practice must be raised. Speaking practice is not just an academic exercise but rather a matter of learning how to coordinate mental and physical abilities. It succeeds largely on the same principles as those for acquiring skill in musical or athletic performance.

Frequency and overall volume of practice are needed so that conscious commands in the nervous system for muscular movement can be converted into automatic commands. Put another way, frequency and volume of input give the brain enough data to make a statistically reliable generalization and form a linguistic rule.

A small insufficient input of data, for example, would lead the brain to conclude that the English plural is formed by adding the sound [s] (lips, cats, sticks); a wider, more valid sampling would show that this is only true when the noun ends in a voiceless consonant, and that when the preceding sound is voiced, the plural is indicated by the sound [z] (ribs, lids, dogs, toes, nails); even this is not enough, since a still wider sampling would show that [əz] is needed for words ending in a sibilant (cases, mazes, churches, judges).

Next, the adult learner must go beyond “knowing the rules” to “internalizing the rules.” Getting the brain and nervous system to convert all this to the automatic mode, however, is not something we can control. At this point the conscious thinking process, the technical aspect, must be left behind. Thinking mechanically about techniques for dancing, playing the piano, shooting a basketball, or speaking English naturally might be useful in the initial phases, but when moving on to higher levels of performance, too much conscious thinking about what one is doing results only in awkwardness or paralysis. Somehow, conscious thought must be

circumvented. In dance, music, and athletics the sheer enjoyment of coordinated physical activity provides its own euphoria; it allows us to stop thinking so much and lets the subconscious take over. And that is where the quantum leap is made to “automatic.” In language - training this is not quite as easy.

Rhythm, Chant, and Song: Distracting the Conscious Mind

Fortunately, rhythm, chant and song permit us to experience this feeling in some measure. This, I think, is part of the attraction of rap music. You do not even have to understand what the rapper is saying to enjoy it. But to be able to do it oneself would be a linguistic high. With patient coaching and practice, it can be done.

In my classes, I usually introduce rhythm, verse, and relaxed pronunciation informally and without fanfare: it's time, for example, for each student to give an oral report (speech) about her summer vacation, to be followed by an impromptu “press conference” in which she will try to respond to spontaneous questions from the others. I ask if anyone would like to go first. If there is no response, I launch into a “choosing rhyme”:

Eeney, meeney, miney, moe!

Catch a tiger by the toe!

If he hollers, let him go!

Eeney, meeney, miney, moe!

—Children's “choosing” rhyme

With each word, I point at a student and go through the entire class in order. The student I happen to point at on the final “moe!” is designated as the first speaker.

There is no technical discussion or instruction in relaxed pronunciation, no repetition practice and no memorization. It is simply a device for choosing fairly and at random. But suddenly introducing this device, with some clear English,

mixed with nonsense words and bizarre images, captures their attention. Sometimes, in a single recitation, students have caught the general rhythmic pattern. Curiosity is aroused. "Sensei, what was that?" If things go well and it is a lively class, "Sensei, teach it to us!"

This is the best way. I will teach it to them and make them learn it, if I have to, but it is much better if they want to learn it, as if learning it was their idea, not mine. At this point, coaching and training begins and it is actually quite strict. The rhythmic structure is set and allows for virtually no variation. One cannot use "katakana" pronunciation without destroying the rhythm and the mood:

Kyatchi a taigaa bai za to:

Ifu hi horazu, retto himu go

For best results: apply liaison to catch a, to produce [käçh θ]; drop the h from he and apply liaison between f and e: [,fi]; drop the h from him and apply liaison between t and i : [let ,m]; since t is between vowels and the preceding vowel is stressed, apply the "flap" rule, which shortens and weakens articulation of the t; we shall write it here as d, but it actually resembles closely the Japanese consonant r in the Japanese ra - ri - ru - re - ro series. Cook (practice) until smooth. Serve when ready:

[käçh θ taig θ r bai th θ to",

,fi hal θ rz, led ,m go"]

The use of a "choosing" rhyme is a semi - spontaneous Interlude (see above) before returning to the main lesson. It is always in stock, ready for use but its use is not planned. It provides a break of a few seconds to a few minutes, depending on how far one goes with it. But even as an enjoyable break or change of pace, it teaches important skills. The students only think we are having an entertaining diversion. I myself am deadly serious.

If I can get to the stage of teaching them to perform the “choosing” rhyme, the rhyme allows me to sidestep their conscious attention. That attention is focussed on learning a neat little ditty and they want to master it (one hopes). But the “neat little ditty” is a strict taskmaster, because its rhythmic requirements demand a high level of relaxed, natural pronunciation.

Once the choosing rhyme has been internalized in the students’ minds, there is a very high probability, I would guess, that it would stay there forever, as rhythmic verse is wont to do.

Next, we can work formally on longer, set pieces of verse. Being longer, they require longer spans of concentration, but, when mastered, offer a greater sense of accomplishment. Mother Goose provides many kinds of nursery rhymes, long and short, and some are short stories in themselves.

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill,
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down,
And broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

Then up Jack got,
And home did trot,
As fast as he could caper;
To old Dame Dob,
Who patched his nob
With vinegar and brown paper. . .

Even relative clauses and irregular past tenses can be covered in a covert grammar review:

. . . . This is the cow with the crumpled horn
That tossed the dog
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.

Pease Porridge has always been a favorite in my classes with young and old alike. I add to it a clapping - patting game in which the students pair up and clap their own hands and pat their partner's hands in time with the verse.

Pease Porridge hot,
Pease porridge cold,
Pease porridge in the pot
Nine days old.

Some like it hot,
Some like it cold,
Some like it in the pot
Nine days old.

The pace is gradually accelerated until the pairs are reciting and clapping and patting in a frenzied blur of motion. Even failure results in squeals of laughter and mirth.

Some Mother Goose rhymes are also known to us as songs:

Here we go round the mulberry bush,
The mulberry bush, the mulberry bush,
Here we go round the mulberry bush,

Rhythm, Chants, Verse, and Song in Oral Language Instruction

On a cold and frosty morning.

Or there is:

London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down,
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair lady.

If Mother Goose sounds too much like 19th-century English, we can go to Carolyn Graham's Jazz Chants for modern vocabulary and modern concerns:

On a Diet

First she gave up smoking,
Then she gave up gin.
Then she gave up chocolate cake.
She wanted to be thin.

Then she gave up breakfast.
Then she gave up lunch.
On lazy Sunday mornings
she even gave up brunch.
No matter what she gave up,
her skirts were very tight.

'Cause she ate twelve cans of tuna fish
for dinner every night.

For those who like American similes ("He skedaddled like a cat on a hot tin

roof”), Graham offers of slew of common ones:

Well, He Eats Like a Pig

Well, he eats like a pig,
he can't get enough.
He works like a dog,
he looks real tough.
He smokes like a chimney,
four packs a day.
He sleeps like log,
What more can I say?

He drinks like a fish,
Scotch on the rocks.
When he gets real mad,
he hardly talks.
He cries like a baby
when he's feeling sad.
He's the dearest friend
I've ever had.

Making Use of Popular Culture

Singing is surely one of the more enjoyable forms of play, as the karaoke craze has proven. For many a working person, housewife, and student, it is the Interlude of choice, the ultimate battery - charger. One can have fun, socialize, get rid of stress, and go home exhilarated.

Although it took me a long time to get up the courage to sing the song Second

Love in Japanese in front of others, I found it to be great training in increasing my reading speed and in widening my field of vision to take in a whole line at once. The first time I did it, lines disappeared and were replaced before I was halfway through them. It was like trying to keep up with a tachistoscope, which I suppose, it was, but it was an entertaining one.

For several weeks, I needed a “co-pilot” to sing along beside me and prompt me when I stumbled or could not read a kanji character. But I loved the song and had become hooked (addicted is more accurate). I was determined to master it. I bought a Walkman and the tape and trained myself with the kashi kaado whenever I had a spare moment. Onsets of lines gave me problems but I stuck with it. Also, by taking up karaoke, I was able to become an active participant in contemporary Japanese culture and join the group.

Seeing from my own experience how useful AND enjoyable karaoke was, I wanted to bring it into the classroom. I was looking for something beyond Mother Goose and Jazz Chants, something that could be merged with popular culture and simple fun.

However, I was not very interested in doing standard English karaoke numbers like My Way or I Left My Heart in San Francisco. “Old favorites” like these were too “schmaltzy” for my taste and rather irrelevant, I thought, for the students. These days, quite a few American songs have become available on karaoke disks, reverse imports resulting from the growing popularity of karaoke in America, England, and Australia. For those of us who grew up in the Fifties, Sixties or Seventies and liked Presley, the Beatles, Peter, Paul, and Mary, The Carpenters, or Simon and Garfunkel, this was fine.

I wanted something closer to my students, but to my knowledge at the time, there was little or nothing available. The only way I was going to get such material, I concluded, was to do it myself and so I decided to try my hand at working up an English version to my first love in karaoke, Second Love, the song I had struggled so hard to master.

At the time, it was still a relatively recent song, sung by a current star

(Nakamori Akina). As I learned later, Kisugi Takao (music) and his sister, Etsuko (lyrics), were also responsible for quite a few other popular songs, among them Ohashi Junko's Silhouette Romance and Yakushimaru Hiroko's Seelaa-fuku to Kikanjû (Yume no Tochû).

The first thing I needed was the actual karaoke musical accompaniment, because the English not only had to be natural and make sense but also, every bit as important, it had to fit the rhythm of the original music. A visit to my favorite karaoke lounge took care of that and I began working out the English lyrics.

This process took several months and countless revisions, but gradually the song began to take on an acceptable form. Soon my students were singing to a familiar Japanese melody but singing in natural English, and enjoying themselves in the process.

Second Love

[Song: Nakamori Akina, Kisugi Takao]

[Melody: Kisugi Takao; Lyrics: Kisugi Etsuko]

[English lyrics©: Ken Kuroiwa]

Love the second time around
And so nice that I have found
This love with you to share,
To really care!

Love the second time around
And it's you that I have found.
You whisper sweetly in my ear
As I hold you near.

I need to have you at my side,
I wanna hold your hand in mine!
I wish I could say
"I love you so!"

And I search for words to say,
Just to show what's in my heart,
Then I look down
So helplessly!

I don't wanna leave you now!
I just wanna hold you tight!
But no matter how I try,
It's too hard to say!

The shadows lengthen on,
And time just won't stand still!
But I'd like to make this day
Last for evermore!

* So take me in your arms
So far away, where
Time will never end!
As long as you are
with me here,
I don't care!

So take me in your arms
So far away, where
Time will never end
I wanna stay right
with you here,
Endlessly!

** How I wish you knew
How much I need you!
Words just can't express
The way I feel about you, dear!
Can't you see?

Parting is, you know,
The sweetest sadness!
Please don't leave me yet!
A moment more is all I ask!
Stay with me!

Repeat *, **

Doing the song in class was best when it was still current. Of course, trends change and Akina has faded, but as long as the song is still available on karaoke, it must be enjoying a certain amount of continuing popularity. The only solution is to try to stay current and work on newer songs.

Since then, I have come across other Japanese popular songs available in English. A group of them is available in a collection called Songs from Coast/Nexus by Takeuchi Mariya. Familiar songs in this album include At the Station (Eki) and Confession (Kokuhaku). The musical arrangements, however, for these songs have been reworked for the English versions and so the English versions are difficult if not impossible to sing with Japanese karaoke music.

Conclusions

Preliterate cultures have handed down tradition and knowledge by word of mouth over hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. A common and effective means of preserving such information has been in the form of rhythmic and melodic devices such as verse, chants, and song. The reason why these work is that they provide a structured framework to which information can be attached.

Rhythm and melody also work because, very simply, they are enjoyable, pleasing to the mind and, if you will, the soul, and can even be addicting. The human mind tends to remember that which is pleasant or appealing, and this fact can be applied when trying to store away information. Advertising agencies are quite aware of this and exploit the seductive charms of rhythm and melody to implant their messages in our minds.

Rhythm and melody can also be utilized effectively as supplements (Interludes) to regular classroom work, to teach the highly technical skills of native-like American English pronunciation. Interludes provide a change of pace, but actually keep the students working on these skills. Up to a point, they can be taught and drilled, but to get the student to internalize them, it is necessary to get around their conscious thinking. One way to do is to have them apply these skills in simple

verses, rhymes, and songs. Again, the simple fact of enjoyment distracts the conscious mind from the technical aspects of the task.

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NOTES AND CITATION

¹ Briggs, Raymond. *The Mother Goose Treasury*.

² Both Fais and Satawal, relatively large islands in Micronesia, are little larger Tokyo's Yoyogi Park.

³ Lewis, 1972. *We the Navigators*, p.32.

⁴ NEWSWEEK magazine, September 20, 1993, pp.42 - 43; TIME magazine, September

20, 1993, pp.44 - 45.

⁵ Thomas, Stephen D., 1987. The Last Navigator, p.266.

⁶ The actual situation is more complicated. With the change of seasons, certain constellations are no longer visible at night. The three stars of Orion's Belt, for example, is known as a winter constellation but is not visible in summer. So what does one do when a constellation is "out of season" or invisible? In teaching me a small piece of simple navigational lore while I was on Satawal, my teachers required that I learn not only the basic constellations and their positions in the sky, but also that I be able to point out their positions, upon demand, at any time. A navigator heading for Truk must be able to identify the rising position of Mailap in or out of season, day or night, clear weather or cloudy. Indeed, total blindness is not necessarily a career - ending handicap for a navigator.

But how does one know where on the horizon Mailap rises on a cloudy day ?

This is where Mailap takes on additional importance. The dominant wind - driven wave, or swell, in the Carolines is out the east, driven by the tradewinds and comes under the celestial course of Mailap. Thus, this wave is known as Laul - faal - Mailap (Wave - under - Mailap). Once this swell is located, one knows where east is and where Mailap rises on the horizon. Thomas Gladwin named his book East is a Big Bird after Mailap, or Aquila (The Eagle).

⁷ Thomas, p. 205.

⁸ The term Interlude is borrowed from Ken Rehg, a colleague at the University of Hawaii. Rehg developed the Ponapean language materials for Peace Corps training and introduced me to this concept of Interludes.

⁹ This translation is the writer's ad hoc version.

¹⁰ The alphabetic transliteration here is not a standard one.

¹¹ Jazz Chants (1978), Jazz Chants for Children (1979), The Electric Elephant (1982), Small Talk: more Jazz Chants (1986), Jazz Chant Fairy Tales (1988), all by Oxford University Press; with Sergio Aragones, Rhythm and Role Play (1991) JAG Publications; and The Chocolate Cake: songs and poems for children (1992) Regents/Prentice Hall.

- ¹² Performing under the stage name Carolina Shout, Carolyn Graham is also a professional musician (ragtime piano and jazz kazoo).
- ¹³ Graham, Carolyn, 1978. Jazz Chants, p.x.
- ¹⁴ BBC Enterprises (BBC Education and Training), The Story of English, Vol. 6: Black on White (Video tape series).
- ¹⁵ Graham, Carolyn, 1978. Jazz Chants. p.xi.
- ¹⁶ My students have pointed out that in school they would have been chastised and marked down for pronouncing “for” as “für”, even in a phrase. They were amazed that I was actually instructing them to do this.
- ¹⁷ The name of the particular work escapes me, but Shakespeare plays with this liaison phenomenon. “Nuncle?” inquires one of his characters, meaning “Mine uncle?”
- ¹⁸ Sound Advice: a basis for listening. Stacy A. Hagen. Prentice Hall Regents, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. 1988.
- ¹⁹ It was, therefore, very surprising to hear former President Carter, at his inauguration ceremony, begin his oath of office by using informal style: “I, Jimmy Carter, . . .,” which stood out like a sore thumb. Certainly, at a time like this, one would have expected “I, James E. Carter, . . .” or “I, James Earl Carter, . . .”
- ²⁰ Hagen, Stacy A., Sound Advice: a basis for listening. p. xi.