

Case Study on the Singing Languages and Music Learning of Six Years Old Foochow Children in Sarikei

Annie Wong Kai Sze

*Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia
E-mail: aniwks@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The choice of language used in singing has an effect on children's response towards music. As multiple languages are used among the Foochow community in Sarikei, which is located in Sarawak, East Malaysia, they provide the researcher an opportunity to observe the influence of different languages, namely Mandarin, Malay, English, and Foochow dialect in the song learning process of 16 six year-old children. It was found that children are more musical singing in the Mandarin and Foochow dialect as compared to singing in the languages of Malay and English. The process of urbanization has also caused the vanishing of traditional arts as well as the decline in the usage of Foochow dialects, in which the change of community and environment have affected the enculturation process of language among Foochow children.

Keywords: Singing languages, Foochow community, Sarawak, enculturation, children's musical response

INTRODUCTION

Language and music are both the products of human intelligence, and they are also the representatives of a culture within certain community. The language used in a specific culture, which has distinctive syllabic structure, rhythmic character and intonation, has influence on its music. Therefore, singing in a language other than one's mother tongue, which characteristic is different from the mother tongue, could cause difficulty to the singer in the aspect of speaking accent and singing diction, especially a six year-old child. If so, does language matter in music learning? How does singing in different languages influence the music learning among the children? Do children learn more effectively when they sing in their mother tongue? This paper examines the influence of different languages in singing, which are Malay, English, Mandarin and Foochow dialect, and its evidence on musical response of the six year-

old Foochow children in Sarikei, in the state of Sarawak, East Malaysia. The relationship between learning efficiency and community's perception of the language, especially the four languages used in music teaching carried out by the researcher, was examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bright (1963) claimed that there are correlations between language and music, as all the cultures used the same physical train in deriving both linguistic and musical systems, such as the close association between rhythmic patterns of Hungarian folk melody and the practice of stressing the first syllables in the Hungarian language (Brocklehurst, 1971). In the concept of 'Musilanguage' by Brown (2001), the point of convergence between music and language is combinatorial syntax and intonation phrasing. It indicated that phrase, as a basic unit of structure that functions for both the music and language,

Received: 20 August 2009

Accepted: 29 April 2010

later generates to higher-order structures through combinatorial rules. Thus, both language and music consist of sequences that are structured according to syntactic regularities (Jentschke *et al.*, 2008).

Koelsch *et al.* (2005) conducted a study in Germany using Event Related Potentials (ERPs) to investigate the simultaneous processing of language and music using visually presented sentences and auditory presented chord sequences. Music-syntactically regular and irregular chord functions were presented synchronously with syntactically correct or incorrect words. Music-syntactically irregular chords elicited an early right anterior negativity (ERAN). Syntactically incorrect words elicited a left anterior negativity (LAN). The results demonstrated that processing of musical syntax (as reflected in the ERAN) interacts with the processing of linguistic syntax (as reflected in the LAN), and that this interaction is not due to a general effect of deviance-related negativities that precede an LAN, but indicates a strong overlap of neural resources involved in the processing of syntax in language and music. Jentschke *et al.* (2008) also conducted a study in Germany to look at the ERAN (early right anterior negativity) and N5 (an anterior negativity with a latency of around 550 ms which usually co-occurs with the ERAN), using two specific event-related brain potentials (ERPs) components that could reflect the music-syntactic and language syntax processing in children. The neural resources posited there were overlapped of these processes, where it implicated a strong interrelation between the language and music processing system.

In the Philippines, the Lubuagan Kalinga First Language Experiment was carried for ten years in the classrooms to test the efficiency of mother tongue-based multilingual education scheme - MLE in teaching the local students of Lubuagan, Kalinga province (Duran Nolasco, 2009). MLE teaches students to read and write in their mother tongue, as well as using mother tongue in teaching subjects like Mathematics, Science, Health and Social Studies, instead of using national languages, which are Filipino

and English, as the mediums of instruction (Duran Nolasco, 2009; Dumatog and Dekker, 2004). The test showed that the classes which were implemented with MLE scored nearly eighty percent mastery of the curriculum as compared to the classes that were implemented with conventional bilingual educational scheme and used Filipino and English as the mediums of instruction. It provides a crucial evidence that the mother tongue instruction strengthened the learning of English and Filipino and did not hinder the learning of contents (Duran Nolasco, 2009; Dumatog and Dekker, 2004). Besides, the MLE programme also reported positive effects on educators, parents and students (Dumatog and Dekker, 2004; Dekker, 2002). Teachers were found to be resourceful and creative in teaching, where it was shown to successfully sustain the learning interest of the students. The concern among illiterate parents' on their children's education was enhanced as they became daily consultants for children's inquiry in learning mother tongue. In fact, they became responsive in giving co-operations to teachers as they were called to evaluate their children's development. Finally, students' attendance was found to have greatly improved as they gained the perceptions that learning in class has become pleasant, dynamic and interactive.

The mentioned research in Philippines posited the two-way interactions between Background and Educational Treatment factors. The results generated the medium of instructions of school programmes for minority language children is of particular constellations of social factors, rather than the choice of language as an independent variable. According to UNESCO (1953), the mismatched between the language used at home and school led to academic retardation, and this is supported by Downing (1974) who stated that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue.

Language Context of the Foochow Community

The Foochow community comprised of the immigrants from Fujian (福建), China, who came to Southeast Asia during 19th century due

to the demand of labour force in the agricultural sector in East Malaysia. The first reclamation area of the Foochow community was in Sungai Merah, Sarawak, where it gradually extended in later years under the leadership of Huang Naishang (1849-1924) – the first Kangchu of New Foochow and James M. Hoover (American missionary – the Father of Development of the Foochow community) (Huang, 2005; Fang, 1996). Sarikei has been one of their obtained wasteland for cultivation since 1912s, which is located at the downstream of the Rejang River (Huang, 2005; Fang, 1996). At present, the natives of Chinese are approximately 26,400 of the total 67,300, which is the biggest population in Sarikei (Monthly Statistical Bulletin Sarawak, 2008). Among the Chinese community, the Foochow MinQing (閩清) comprises 70% of the Chinese population. The rest of the natives in Sarikei are Iban (18,600), Melanau (11,000), Melayu (9,000), Bidayuh (200), other bumiputera (100) and non-Malaysian citizen (1,900).

The MinQing Foochow in Sarikei speaks Foochow dialect and Mandarin as their cultural languages, whereby the earlier is the informal language and the latter the formal language of the community. In the Foochow community, Mandarin is considered as the main language for educational purpose, especially in the kindergarten and primary school, where this situation has a relation with the development of its educational system in history. The educational system of the Foochow community has an inseparable relationship with Christianity. During the reclamation period (since 1903), churches were built in every wasteland region. According to Huang (2005), Rev. Hoover used his political advantage in helping the community to build schools which were attached to the church. Every school was managed by a preacher who was also the teacher assisting in the daily teaching (Huang, 2005). In 1916, big numbers of churches and schools among the Chinese community caused difficulties for Rev. Hoover in managing the quality and effectiveness of the educational programmes in different regions (Huang, 2005). It resulted

in leaving the ‘Management Board’ which was formed by a group of local Chinese (mostly MinQing Christians) in each region to function as the Ministry of Education, which was directly responsible to the government (Huang, 2005). This educational system and strategy were set as a role model for the Foochow community in managing the Chinese secondary, primary and preschool education programme until these days (Chen *et al.*, 1951; Huang, 2005). According to Huang Renqiong (1951), the dual language system of both English and Mandarin was emphasised in the educational system during the reclamation period. On the other hand, Malay language was introduced as a compulsory subject in educational programmes of the Foochow community only after 1970s, as the whole Malaysia educational system was unified (Zhuang, 2004).

*The Language Environment in Sarikei:
Foochow Dialect, Mandarin, English and
Malay*

The Foochow dialect is the most significant feature of the community culture in comparison to others. In the past, the Foochow dialect was the most commonly used language among the community (the labours) as compared to Mandarin due to the fact that Mandarin was only spoken by those who were educated. During the reclamation period, the Foochow dialect was used as the teaching language, for preaching in Sunday services and daily communication among the Foochow natives. This language is still used up to the present day in daily communication, interaction between individuals, as way of expression of thoughts and organization of human activities, such as in dealing with businesses, formal works, and educating purposes.

Mandarin is considered as the formal speaking language that is widely used among the Foochow community in organizing community events, public talks, Sunday service, communicating with other Chinese communities such as Cantonese, Hokkien, MinNan, and Hakka. Mandarin is particularly important in

the primary and preschool education among the Foochow community as it is the medium of instruction for the teaching and also the language of communication between the teachers and students. Moreover, Mandarin is used as the medium of instruction as teaching in language classes such as Malay and English. In the recent years, young parents begin to substitute the Foochow dialect with Mandarin in their daily communication with their children due to the process of urbanization and the learning trend of the Chinese primary schools in the community. As Mandarin is used as the teaching language in classrooms and the contents of text books consist mostly of the Chinese text, it is thought that speaking Mandarin to children in their early years could cultivate their language competence and help in achieving advance academic performance in the future.

During the reclamation period, English was taught since Year Two in the primary school. English education in school prepared the local people in handling formal working duties with the English government. At present, English is commonly used among government servants of the Foochow community who are living in the urban areas when dealing with their formal work, but not in their daily communication. It is important to note that learning English is not stressed among most of the Foochow natives in Sarikei. However, English speakers are treated as if they have a higher social position for it equivalence to the status of the better educated.

Meanwhile, the formal Malay speaking is not widely used among the community. For most of the Foochow natives, Malay language is not more than a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. While informally, Malay speaking is quite commonly used for communication among people of the different races, such as Chinese, Iban, Malay and Indian, especially regarding business matters. However, the language spoken is organized in simple sentences and often a mixture with other languages like Foochow, Hokkien, Iban, and Mandarin.

In summary, the Foochow dialect is the mother tongue of the Foochow community in Sarikei while Mandarin is the language that

is shared among the Chinese communities in Sarikei, where English and Malay language are used among a small amount of residents in Sarikei. Through generalizing the opinions from the interviews with the Foochow natives, kindergarten teachers as well as researcher's personal experience of being a Foochow native in Sarikei, it is thought that the most striking features that set the Foochow dialect and Mandarin apart from English and Malay language in the Foochow community perhaps are the tone system in pronunciation, the use of consonance in pronunciation, the number of syllables per word, and the structure of sentences.

The Foochow dialect and Mandarin use a similar tone system for pronunciation; Mandarin has four tones known as Pinyin, while the Foochow dialect has a more complicated tone system as compared to Mandarin. Secondly, Foochow and Mandarin have less consonance in pronunciation and it's the use of consonance in words is distinctly different from the Malay language and English. For instance, the initial sound of the Foochow dialect and Mandarin pronunciation starts with a vowel, single or the most with two consonances and always end with a vowel, while English and Malay language uses consonance(s) for both its initial and final sounds in vast words. For Malay language, the syllables in a word are separated by consonance, a situation which is unnatural in the Foochow dialect and Mandarin language of pronunciation. Besides, the Foochow dialect and Mandarin have consonances 'ch', 'sh', and 'zh' at the initial sound of pronunciation, while English uses such consonances in its final tone. Thirdly, both the Foochow dialect and Mandarin are monosyllabic, which means that the vast majority of words have one syllable in length, in comparison to English and Malay which have more syllables in presenting a word. Finally, the structure of sentences is organized differently in the mentioned four languages. In particular, the Foochow dialect and Mandarin have a close organization in its sentence structures as compared to the other two languages.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents' Profile

In order to understand the present situation of music making among the kindergarten children in Sarikei, the principles and teachers of six kindergartens, which are located within 7 miles from Sarikei town, were interviewed. These kindergartens are privately organized, either attached to church directly or by the Management of Board of primary schools. The leaders of the management board and teachers interviewed are Foochow and ninety percent of the students from the six kindergartens are also Foochow. Mandarin is the teaching language used, while the Foochow dialect is used as the informal communication during recess time or as further explanation whenever is needed, particularly for the classes of four year old children. Meanwhile, English and Malay languages are rarely used as the medium of instruction in kindergartens in Sarikei. They are taught only according to the contents of the related language text books.

Singing with movement was found to be the most frequent music making activities in Sarikei kindergartens where children learned through imitation and repetition. Singing in Mandarin language had the highest preference, where seventy-six percent of the song collection was in Mandarin while the rest was in English language. It reflected the influence of Children Sunday School system in Sarikei churches in terms of teaching approach, activities conducted, and language used in singing. Indeed, most of the kindergarten teachers are Christian and also the teachers of Children Sunday School. Therefore, it is a common practice for them to adapt similar contents and approaches of the music teaching in the kindergartens.

In this study, two groups of respondents were randomly selected from two Sarikei kindergartens attending the music classes. Each group of the respondents consisted of four male and four female children aged six years having the Foochow family background. The living regions of the informants were within five miles distance from Sarikei town. They have no

music background and are now receiving formal preschool education in Sarikei kindergartens.

Teaching Setting

The teaching module consisted of twenty-four music lessons with constructed musical activities, with thirty minutes each. It is applied twice a week and the duration for completing the study is twelve weeks. The teaching materials used are based on the children songs that were collected during a preliminary survey on the musical practices among the kindergartens in Serdang and Sarikei in June-August, 2008. Besides the singing language, the selection of songs for the teaching module took into consideration the complexity of the song text, length of song, arrangement of songs, potential of song that could easily to be accommodated to different playing situations, and the balance of the contents in relation to the playing types of the teaching module to decide the song amount and song characteristics to be selected.

Musical activities were taught to two groups of children. The purposeful selection of singing language for each group of the respondents was to determine whether the different cultural contexts did affect the efficiency and quality of music learning. Group One (English and Malay songs) illustrated the usage of the language context which is totally different from the Foochow culture, while Group Two (Chinese songs) showed the significant existence of a specific cultural context in the selected community. On the other hand, Mandarin remained as the medium of instructions for both groups to maintain the usual teaching setting in the classroom of the Foochow community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: SINGING AND PLAYING USING SONGS OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

Singing in Malay Language

Research by anthropologists has showed that the memory skills developed and functioned differently, depending on the cultural context

(Rogoff and Mistry, 1985). It is certainly true as children are singing in the Malay language, which is rarely practiced in the daily lives of these children. Hence, children were found to be difficult to manage, especially the pronunciation and the pace of memorisation. This directly contributed to the decline in sustaining children's interest, concentration level, and emotional condition. The result of a case when children singing a Malay song <Gelang Sipaku Gelang> [refer to Fig. 1] is given below.

*Gelang sipaku gelang
Gelang si rama-rama
Pulang marilah pulang
Marilah pulang bersama-sama.
(Stop!)*

**'Stop!'-children need to freeze as teacher call the word.*

Children were found to be unable to memorize the text even when they were at their fifth play. This singing section was led by the teacher with frequent reminder of singing together but received a passive response from the children. At the best, the children could remember only the first line of text and tended to mix up the second line with the first, while the rest were sung in fragments. The researcher also

found that the children, to some extent, refused to give more tries as they had low confidence in their ability in doing the Malay song. As children could not understand the text, it was hard for them to memorize.

Besides, a different system of phoneme combination further complicates their pronunciation. This could be another reason for their passive attitude. In such a situation, the physical movements accompanying the song, seemed to be easier to learn and were tended to be more active and dominant and hence distract the singing. As physical movements were clearly visible, it enables children to observe their peers' movements and this enhanced interaction among them. Indeed, children rarely had eye contact with the role model during the play, but seemed to focus only on the sequence of playing. Consonance was often omitted by the children. Their singing became less confident whenever there was an interval that was more than a week between the teachings of the same song.

However, the children were found to show high awareness towards the teacher's singing of <Gelang Sipaku Gelang>. Indeed, they seemed comfortable to stay just listening. When they were not asked to sing, the teacher's singing voice stimulated active physical responses and increased learning interest among the children.

4/4 Gelang Sipaku Gelang

5̣ | 1• 3̣ 5̣ 3̣ 3̣ 1̣ | 2 - - 5̣ |
Ge - lang si - pa - ku ge - lang, Ge -

| 1• 7̣ 2̣ 1̣ 1̣ 6̣ | 5̣ - - 2̣ 3̣ |
- lang si ra - ma - ra - ma. Pu -

| 4• 4̣ 6̣ 5̣ 5̣ 4̣ | 3• 3̣ 5̣ 4̣ 4̣ 3̣ |
- lang, ma - ri - lah pu - lang, ma - ri - lah pu -

| 2• 2̣ 4̣ 3̣ 3̣ 2̣ | 1 - - || ***Stop!**
- lang ber - sa - ma - sa - ma.

Fig. 1: Malay song - Gelang Sipaku Gelang

For instance, the children became excited towards the end of a song, starting from the third line of the text, anticipating the ‘Stop!’ at the end. They might not remember the text but they could recall with ease the sequence of the play as soon as they heard the singing.

Singing in the English Language

The result obtained for the singing in the English language remained insignificantly different from those singing in the Malay language. Similarly, the children were observed to have encountered the pronunciation and understanding difficulties regarding the song text. However, the children seemed to show a more positive learning attitude in singing the English songs as compared to Malay language. Below is an example of singing an English song <Charlie Over the Ocean> [refer to Fig. 2].

*Charlie over the ocean,
Charlie over the sea,
Charlie catches a big fish,
But can't catch me!*

*‘me!’: Children run around to catch fish.

The early stage of learning (the first three plays) showed a similar learning condition as in the Malay song <Gelang Sipaku Gelang>, where flat facial expression occurred, passive singing (soft voice, sing when instructions given) and stiff in terms of the body gesture. However, the learning pace showed a much faster progress than in <Gelang Sipaku Gelang>

as some of the children could memorize the text in a more complete manner started from the fourth play. It directly increased their singing interest and confidence level and hence ignored the distraction of pronunciation. For instance, children substituted the consonance with unclear vowel like ‘o’ (over), ‘ach’ (catch) to make up a complete singing phrase. This positive learning condition encouraged those who were in passive manner to join in the singing unconsciously. This situation was mentioned in the study by Toukoma and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) who stated that the motivation of children to learn an unfamiliar language is tied closely to their attitude towards those fluent speakers, where the natural peer attachment produced a strong desire to follow with those who have learned. As the understanding of text had increased (ocean, sea, catch, big fish, can’t catch me), the interpretation of music became creative and musical. For instance, children sung in a rhythmic way by accentuating the first beat, holding hands together and waving according to the beat, doing rhythmic walking as marching, tapping on the target person exactly on the pick point of the song (me! - children tended to put a strong accent on it and used the dynamic of forte), and tended to go faster and louder towards the end of the song, as they were getting excited. These interpretations occurred without any instruction from the role model.

Haviland (1990) stated that culture could also explain the perceived environment. The positive attitude of the Foochow children towards the songs in English language has its relation to the schooling culture, where it was

TABLE 1
Songs commonly taught in dual languages among Sarikei kindergartens

English version	Mandarin version
Ten Little Indian boy	十个印地安男孩
Twinkle Twinkle Little Star	一闪一闪亮晶晶
Oh Mc Donald Had a Farm	王老先生有块地
Landon bridge is Falling Down	伦敦铁桥倒下来

4/4 Charlie Over the Ocean

| 5· 5 3 3 3 5 3 | 5· 5 3 3 3 5 - |
 Char-lie o-ver the o-cean, Char-lie o-ver the sea

| 5· 5 3· 3 5 3· 3 | 5 5 1 - ||
 Char-lie catch a, big fish but can't catch 'Me'!

Fig. 2: English song - Charlie Over the Ocean

more commonly used for music practice in comparison to the songs in the Malay language. However, English songs are used more for listening appreciation than for the teaching of singing. Indeed, among the total of eight English songs being collected among the Sarikei kindergartens, five of them were frequently being adapted to Mandarin text or taught in dual languages, as presented in the following table.

Teachers preferred teaching the song in Mandarin text before introducing the English version. According to the teacher, children could sustain for a longer concentration in learning the Mandarin version and it also prepares the children to learn faster in English version once they have become familiar with the previous version. Through observing the teaching and learning of <Twinkle Twinkle Little Star>, <Oh Mc Donald Had a Farm > and <London Bridge is Falling Down> in both Mandarin and English texts during children's ordinary music lessons, it was found that singing in Mandarin resulted in a lively performance, where children naturally sang using similar dynamic, moved their body to the pulse in group, sang with an accurate pronunciation, etc. In contrast, singing in the English text showed flat intonation and stiff physical movements as compared to Mandarin. In fact, there are children who could not remember the song texts although these songs were also taught to them when they were five year old.

Singing in Mandarin

Singing in the texts in Mandarin received the most supportive response from the children as compared to singing English and Malay songs. As the cultural language of the Foochow children, Mandarin and their preference in singing Mandarin songs reflected the choice of language affects and is affected by, their culture (Haviland, 1990). A familiar language enables a child to express easily, as no fear of making mistake (Duran Nolasco, 2009). Looking from the perspective of an anthropologist, Haviland (1990) mentioned that cultural learner takes the values and beliefs of their culture to interpret experience and generate their behaviour. For instance, singing in Mandarin demonstrated a strong sense of togetherness in terms of its pronunciation, body movements (rhythmic sense and creative movements), emotional conditions (positive learning attitude and imagination), and peer attachment (interpersonal skills).

The fast pace in learning and the smoothness in pronunciation (Mandarin) contributed to the consistency of singing sustainability during the play. Below is an example of singing a Mandarin song - <捕鱼歌> (Bu Yu Ge – The fishing song) [refer to Fig. 3].

白浪滔滔我不怕
 掌起舵儿往前划
 撒网下水到渔家
 捕条大鱼笑哈 (哈!)

*‘哈!’: Children run around to catch fish

This is an example that corresponds to the English song <Charlie Over the Ocean>, but with a much more complicated arrangement of text. The playing sequence of both the activities was exactly the same and it is also sung in a rote manner. As this song is commonly used in the kindergartens, children could pick up the texts and the actions even in the first two rounds of singing. The handling of singing and playing sequence was very independent, where children were able to sustain their singing even without the leading of the teacher. The excitement could clearly be seen through the singing dynamics (*forte*), bright vocal tone (with uncertain pitching), and with strong rhythmic sense in

singing. It was found that the facial and physical expressions of children were much richer than singing English and Malay songs. For instance, children smiled and showed high anticipation from their eye contact, giving signal to friends, frequently showing jumpy movements, shaking hands with excitement, and active interaction of eye contact among their peers.

Gonzalez (2003) stated that one's native language supports critical thinking, while Tucker (1996) claimed that the development of cognitive aspect lies on the usage of mother tongue as a basic of learning. Besides, Dunstan in the writing – *The Manual of Music*, argued that “teaching singing and teaching mother

4/4 捕鱼歌
(*<Bu Yu Ge> - The Fishing Song*)

| 1 3 23 21 | 5 5 5 - |
 白浪滔滔 我不怕,
bai lang tao tao wo bu pa
 (The whitecaps running high but I'm not afraid)

| 6 5 35 32 | 1 1 1 - |
 掌起舵儿 往前划
zhang qi duo er wang qian hua
 (Holding rudder, I row to forward)

| 1 1̇ 61 65 | 6 5 3̇ 2 |
 撒网下水 到渔家
sa wang xia sui dao yu jia
 (Casting the fishing net into the water,
 I reach the fishing village)

| 1 5 32 32 | 1 1 1 - ||
 捕条大鱼 笑哈哈(哈)
bu tiao da yu xiao ha ha
 (Caught a big fish, I Cheer!)

Fig. 3: Mandarin song - 捕鱼歌 (*<Bu Yu Ge> – The fishing song*)

tongue can be closely related where the early stage training in proper breathing and accurate pronunciation of speech sound (singing diction) contributes to good speaking as they are to sweet singing” (Dunstan, 2008). Apparently, singing in Mandarin provided a significant evidence that enables children to demonstrate outstanding musical interpretation even in the early stage of playing. In fact, children demonstrate strong ensemble skills by having a clear breathing point together, singing with an equal dynamic level, the same emotional condition and with an accurate articulation (children tended to allocate accent in some text, for instance ‘我不怕’, ‘往前划’, and 笑哈(哈!)). The sense of togetherness was found to cultivate peer attachment and at the same time led to strong rhythmic sense in music making. For instance, children held hands in a circle and waved according to the rhythm. Besides, children tended to take over the control of play where in many times, children went accelerated on their singing tempo without noticing that their teacher was actually trying to slow them down. Their awareness towards role model’s singing became less as they were in high concentration and had a strong desire in continuing the play. Indeed, the children could carry their singing to start a new round of play without any instruction or voice guidance from teacher.

Singing in the Foochow Dialect

The Foochow song below - <真鸟仔> (Jin Zou Yang – Sparrow) [refer to Fig. 4] is a Chinese folk tune of the children song which is popular among the Foochow community in Fujian, China (Chen *et al.*, 1951). The text of the song was modified by researcher to suit the present context of the Foochow community in Sarikei. As the Foochow song is no longer practiced among the Foochow community in Sarikei, there is no way to generalize the result of singing Foochow songs as what was done to other singing languages. However, the learning of <Jin Zou Yang> showed an outperform of children in relation to its learning pace, interest, motivation, musical expression, and learning

commitment as compared to other songs. Thus, it is believed that to present the results of learning this particular song could provide useful finding for future study.

真鸟仔

真鸟仔, 啄蒲菠, 六岁孩儿会唱歌
不是父母教他唱, 是他肚子通通歌
通通歌, 呀哎呀哎呀!

The learning pace of the Foochow song remained fast as in the Mandarin songs. The children showed a strong passion of singing and learning as compared to singing in other languages. Some action research conducted in Asia, Africa and South America reported during the fourth international workshop “Improving the Quality of Mother Tongue-based Literacy Programmes” from 18 to 22 June of 2007 in Dhaka, Bangladesh (organized by UNESCO Bangkok, in cooperation with UNESCO Dhaka) reported that the initial stage of literacy learning is much more efficient using the language the learner knows the best. In fact, the process of learning has automaticity and leads to the psycholinguistic guessing that relies on a deep understanding of the language itself (UNESCO, 2008). It is certainly true as children seemed to be attracted by the Foochow song even during the first lesson. They kept their eye view focussed when the teacher did the explanation of the text, they smiled happily as they heard the second line of the song text – ‘A six year sold child can sing’ (translated version), laughed happily when reaching the third line of the song text – ‘His stomach can sing very well’ (translated version) and doing jumpy movements. These relaxed and joyful learning phenomena have contributed to expressive singing and movements during the play. It was found that singing in Foochow dialect gave room to the children to move more musically. For instance, well controlled of physical movements, singing in pitch, precise in syncopated rhythm, waved the body gently according to the singing rhythm, creative spatial physical motions, and wider mouth shape while singing with lifted eyebrow. The facial

4/4 真鸟仔
(Jin Zou Yang - Sparrow)

| $\overset{\frown}{3\ 5}$ $\overset{\frown}{6\ i}$ 5 - | $\overset{\frown}{3\ 5}$ $\overset{\frown}{6\ i}$ 5 - |
 真 鸟 仔 啄 蒲 菠,
 jin zou yang dog pu po
 (A sparrow is pecking 'pu po' grass)

| 5 $\overset{\frown}{5\ i}$ $\overset{\frown}{6\ i}$ 5 | $\overset{\frown}{3\ 2\ 3}$ $\overset{\frown}{5\ 3\ 2}$ 1 - |
 六 岁 孩 儿 会 唱 歌
 lüg hui nia ngo é quong go
 (A six years old child can sing)

| $\overset{\frown}{1\ 6}$ $\overset{\frown}{1\ 2}$ $\overset{\frown}{3\ 6}$ 5 | $\overset{\frown}{5\ 3\ 2}$ $\overset{\frown}{3\ 5}$ 2 - |
 不 是 爸 奶 教 伊 唱,
 ng ni ba né ga yi quong
 (It is not taught by the parents)

| 5 $\overset{\frown}{5\ i}$ $\overset{\frown}{6\ i}$ 5 | $\overset{\frown}{3\ 2\ 3}$ $\overset{\frown}{5\ 3\ 2}$ 1 - |
 是 伊 腹 老 通 通 歌
 si yi bu lo tung tung go
 (His stomach can sing very well)

| $\overset{\frown}{3\cdot\ 2}$ $\overset{\frown}{1\cdot\ 2}$ $\overset{\frown}{3\cdot\ 5}$ | 2 1 6 2 1 - ||
 通 通 歌 , 呀 哎 呀 哎 呀!
 tung tung go ya ai ya ai ya
 (Singing well)

Fig. 4: Foochow song - 真鸟仔 (Zhen Niao Zi - Sparrow)

expressions were found richer as compared to singing in other languages, such as smiling throughout the entire play.

The children seemed to have a more closed attachment to this Foochow song than to the others. Parents provided their feedback that their children even performed for them at home. Children seemed excited when the song was reintroduced at their second play by answering in bright tone. They could remember the song and some of them even started to sing before instructions were given, showing jumpy movements with a big smile and more alert in sitting position (sitting straight and more forwarded position). This could be explained

using several reasons, as follows. Firstly, children felt more attached to the song as the Foochow dialect is closely related to their living environment. It is a tool of communication within the family and with friends, the most fluent and well-practiced language at their age and commonly heard in their daily lives. Secondly, the singing text in the Foochow dialect has its humour sense, where children felt entertaining and entertained while singing. For instance, 'his stomach can sing very well' (translated version) and children felt the sense of belonging when they sing 'A six years old child can sing' (translated version), as they were at the same age. The children felt joyful as they

reached these song texts and they tended to smile or laugh while looking around their peers, looking and tapping on their stomach, pointing hands to the stomach extensively.

CONCLUSIONS

Hence, does singing language matter in music learning? From the view point of an anthropologist, Haviland (1990) argued that culture is integrated, where all the cultural aspects of a cultural function as an integrated whole. The studies by Koelsch *et al.* (2005) pointed out the connection between music and speech which are corroborated by the finding of overlapping and shared neural resources for music and language processing in both adult and children, where it appears that at least in early age, human brain does not treat language and music as strictly separates, but rather language as a special case of music. Dunstan (2008) stated that “a child’s speaking voice should indeed be made musical no less than his singing voice”.

Seeing from the children’s perspective, it was found that their musical responses are very much influenced by their mother tongue(s), which are Mandarin and Foochow dialect. In particular, Mandarin and Foochow dialect are significantly well-practiced among the six-year-old respondents of this study as compared to other languages, namely Malay and English language. Therefore, the familiarity of the language provided the sense of belonging that could strengthen the confidence level of children, which then formed a significant ground in supporting children’s music learning. The fast learning pace of singing in the language of Mandarin and Foochow dialect provided an immediate satisfaction among the children as they could witness and enjoy their progressing improvement in music learning. On the contrary, if Malay or English languages were continuously used in the singing activities for the respondents, these would create tension that could become barriers in their music learning. In fact, these could cause children to shift their focus to gain satisfaction. This finding explains that children

from the Foochow community learn through the enculturation process and the learning progress becomes more effective if the teaching applies the language that is most familiar to them.

REFERENCES

- Bright, W. (1963). Language and music: areas for cooperation. *Ethnomusicology*, 7(1), 26-32. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Brocklehurst, B. (1971). *Response to Music: Principles of Music Education*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Brown, S. (2001). The “Musilanguage” Model of Music Evolution. In Nils L. Wallin, B. Merker and S. Brown (Eds.), *The origins of music* (pp. 272-299). Chicago: MIT Press.
- Chen, L.X. *et al.* (1951). *100th Anniversary Publication of the Foochow Frontier Settlement in Sibul Sarawak, Malaysia (1901-2001)*. Sibul: Sibul Foochow Association.
- Dekker, D.E. (2002). A case study of the first language component bridging program in Rural Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Linguistics*, 34(1), 143-149.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia, Sarawak. (2008). *Population Estimates by Ethnic Group and Administrative District – Sarawak, 2008 (Cont’d)*. Kuching, Sarawak: Author.
- Downing, J. (1974). Bilingualism and learning to read. *The Irish Journal of Education*, 8(2), 77-88.
- Dumatog, R.C. and Dekker, D.E. (2004). First language education in Lubuagan, Northern Philippines. Paper presented at the *Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Minority Communities in Asia*, Bangkok, Thailand. Retrieved on July 21, 2009 from http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/parallel_papers/dumatog_and_dekker.pdf.
- Dunstan, R. (2008). *A Manual of Music* (21st Edn.). London: Read Books.
- Fang, J.H. (1996). *The History of Development of Rejang River Sarawak*. Sibul: Cultural Heritage Preservation Committee of Sibul People’s Assembly Hall of Malaysia.

- Gonzalez, A.FSC. (1996). Using two/three languages in Philippine classrooms: Implications for policies, strategies and practises. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 17(2), 210-218.
- Gonzalez, A. FSC. (2003). Language planning in multilingual countries: The case of the Philippines. Retrieved on July 28, 2009 from http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/plenary_papers/andrew_gonzalez.pdf.
- Haviland, W.A. (1990). *Cultural Anthropology* (6th Edn.) Orlando: Rinehart and Wiston.
- Huang, M.L. (2005). *Pionner Trail of Foochow*. Sibuh: Sibuh Foochow Association.
- Huang, R.Q. (1951). Newspaper Shi Hwa. Excerpt sent to the author from the secretary of the Foochow Association in Sarikei, September 2008.
- Jentschke, S. *et al.* (2008). Children with specific language impairment also show impairment of music-syntactic processing. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 20(11), 1940-1951.
- Koelsch, S. *et al.* (2005). Interaction between syntax processing in language and in music: An ERP study. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 17(10), 1565-1577.
- Koelsch, S. and Siebe, W.A. (2005). Towards a neural basis of music perception. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 9(12), 578-584.
- Rogoff, B. and Mistry, J. (1985). Memory development in cultural context. In M. Pressley and C. Brainerd (Eds.), *The cognitive side of memory development*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Toukomaa, P. and Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1977). The intensive teaching of the mother tongue to migrant children of preschool age and children in the lower level of comprehensive school. Helsinki: The Finish National Commission for UNESCO.
- Tucker, G.R. (1996). Some thoughts concerning innovative language education programmes. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 17(2), 315-320.
- UNESCO. (1953). The use of vernacular languages in education. Monographs on fundamental education, 8. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2008). Improving the Quality of Mother Tongue-based Literacy and Learning: Case Studies from Asia, Africa and South America. Bangkok: UNESCO, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.
- Zhuang, Z.S. (2004). *Basic Education in Malaysia*. Guangzhou: Guangdong Education of Publisher.

APPENDIX A

The Preliminary Survey and the Song List of Teaching Module

The songs used in the teaching module are based on the preliminary study that surveyed on the common songs used in the kindergartens. The songs used at five kindergartens in Serdang, Selangor and six kindergartens in Sarikei, Sarawak were studied to identify the different cultural contexts in relation to the singing language (June – August, 2008). Songs collected from Serdang kindergartens were used to teach Group 1, while songs collected from Sarikei kindergartens were used to teach Group 2. It was found that the collection of songs for the kindergartens in Serdang and Sarikei were those that could commonly be found in the market. For Sarikei kindergartens, 90% of the Chinese songs are taught from generation to generation. However, these songs are not treated as traditional tunes but as common songs that are shared among the kindergartens in Foochow community (the statement based on the personal observations and the interviews with the educators and principles of kindergartens throughout the study conducted from June to November in 2008, in Sarikei, Sarawak). Below is the list of songs used in the teaching module.

APPENDIX B

The Teaching Module

The teaching themes used in the teaching module included ‘Birds and Bugs’, ‘Farm Animals’, ‘Wild Animals’, ‘Garden Animals’, ‘Marine Animals’, ‘Rainy Day’, ‘Sunny Day’, ‘A Picnic’, ‘My Weekend’, ‘Day of Adventure’, ‘Visiting the Fair’ and ‘Garden Work’. The types of the musical activity included in the teaching module are ‘singing with movements’, ‘rhythm play’, ‘listening awareness’ and ‘musical games’. Below are the sequence and contents of a music lesson.

English song	<Are you sleeping>, <Hello, how are you?>, <Head shoulder knee and toe>, <London Bridge is falling down>, <Twinkle twinkle little star>, <Charlie over the ocean>, <Birthday Song>, <Oh Mc Donald had a farm>.
	*<Head shoulder knee and toe>, <London Bridge is falling down>, <Twinkle twinkle little star>, <Birthday Song>, <Oh Mc Donald had a farm> are originally Western tune, but have been translated into Mandarin to teach the Foochow children.
Malay song	<Rasa Sayang>, <Legang-lengang kangkung>, *<Atas Bawah Goyang –goyang >, <Gelang Sipaku Gelang>.
	*<Atas Bawah Goyang –goyang > is originally in Chinese tune. The Chinese text of song has been replaced with Malay texts, which organize repetitively throughout the song.
Chinese song	<两只老虎>, <小蜜蜂>, <三轮车>, <我的公鸡不见了>, <造飞机>, <小朋友我们行个礼>, <世界的光>, <十个小孩>, <妈妈的眼睛>, <捕鱼歌>, <妹妹背着洋娃娃>, <当我们同在一起>, <泼水歌>, <小星星>, <茉莉花>, <只要我长大>, <泥娃娃>, <哈巴狗>, <拔萝卜>, <我愿做个好小孩>, <伦敦铁桥掉下来>, <王老先生有块地>, <靠着耶稣圣名>, <耶稣爱我>, <小兵丁>.
Foochow Song	<真鸟仔>

≈ Theme ≈

Section A : Warming up (5min)

Greeting song

Singing and movement

Section B : Main body (22min)

Lesson 1

Listening awareness

Singing and movement

Musical game/ Rhythm
play

Lesson 2

Listening awareness

Story telling and Drama acting

Singing and movement/

Rhythm play/ Musical game

Section C : Calming down (2min)

Rocking song (listening and movement)

Section D: Goodbye song (1min)

**min – minutes*

