

SONGS: A STEP FORWARD FOR THE APPROPRIATION OF FRENCH CULTURE IN MIDDLE 1ST GRADE CLASSES

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Abstract: Song is a powerful means of communication that transcends linguistic frontiers, enabling the appropriation of cultural diversity. It's are considered as an educational and a substantial dependable reference used in teaching and learning. This paper presents the results of questionnaire survey conducted with Algerian middle school teachers analyzing the place they accord to intercultural competence in their teaching of French, more specifically the role of the French song in opening up French culture. The study aims also to analyze the representations of pupils in 1st year of middle school with regard to the French language and culture in order to determine whether the introduction of French-language song, in all its musical and socio-cultural richness, could foster the acquisition of intercultural competence and, in these conditions, encouraging the promotion of otherness and tolerance.

Keywords: intercultural, classroom, FFL, song, francophone

A LA CHANSON : UNE PASERELLE POUR L'APPROPRIATION DE LA CULTURE FRANCAISE EN CLASSE DE 1 ère ANNÉE MOYENNE

Résumé : La chanson est un puissant moyen de communication qui transcende les frontières linguistiques, permettant l'appropriation de la diversité culturelle. Elle est considérée comme un document éducative fiable dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Cet article présente les résultats d'une enquête par questionnaire menée auprès d'enseignants de collèges algériens analysant la place qu'ils accordent à la compétence interculturelle dans leur enseignement du français, plus précisément le rôle de la chanson francophone dans l'ouverture à la culture française. L'étude vise également à analyser les représentations des élèves de 1ère année du collège à l'égard de la langue et de la culture françaises afin de déterminer si l'introduction de la chanson francophone, dans toute sa richesse musicale et socioculturelle, pourrait favoriser la l'acquisition de compétences interculturelles et, dans ces conditions, favoriser la promotion de l'altérité et de la tolérance.

Mots-clés : interculturel, classe, FLE, chanson, francophone

Introduction

Music is an undeniable part of our daily lives. It constantly surrounds us through the radio, the television, the Internet and many other ways. As Plato said, "Music is a moral law; it gives a soul to our hearts, wings to our thoughts and a lift to our imaginations. It is a charm to sadness, to gaiety, to life and to everything." In this way, song becomes a reflection of the society by inserting itself into current events. In this regard, Claude Duneton states the following:

If you want to know people, I sincerely believe you have to study their songs, just as you do with their monuments, their tools and their books. In the songs, we discover a little flesh and blood of our ancestors with traces of

their virtue, but more importantly their feelings, emotions and impulses that drove their lives and enveloped their loves, as well as their hates, heroism and drinking.

Duneton (1998: 1090)

Numerous scholars have pointed out that playing songs in the classroom can elicit positive emotions among learners. As a result, this creates a cheerful and enjoyable environment that facilitates the process of language acquisition. The mind becomes more receptive to new information when it is in a positive state (Spicher & Sweeney, 2007; Medina, 1993). Song is generally regarded as a form of entertainment, an artistic expression that we can judge according to our own tastes without giving it the importance it deserves. However, song is much more than just a means of entertaining and a waste of time. It's also a valuable tool for learning the language. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his "Dictionnaire de musique" (Music Dictionary), defines song as the following :

The use of songs seems to be a natural consequence of speech, and is not in fact less widespread because wherever people talk, they sing. To imagine them, all it took was to deploy one's organs, to give a pleasant twist to the ideas we like to deal with, and to strengthen, by the expression of which the voice is capable, the feeling that one could convey, or the image that one could paint.

Rousseau (1768: 78)

Rousseau (1678) considers that the use of song is a natural extension of the use of speech because wherever there is speech, there is also song. Creating songs, according to him, simply requires using one's vocal abilities, giving a pleasing twist to the ideas that preoccupy us and reinforcing, through vocal expression, the feeling or image we wish to convey. In addition, M. Boiron, states that contemporary song "reinforces the topicality of the learned language and its insertion in today's world" (2013); what confirms its usefulness as a communication tool for students. Songs are particularly close to young people's hearts, as they find their way through lyrics that address their lives, their desires, their expectations, their revolts, and many other subjects that are specific to them. These multiple uses demonstrate that «song is an extraordinary garden of unsuspected resources for learning what can inspire learners and teachers to realize their dreams" (Briet, 2012: 2). Introducing French-language songs into language teaching should not be limited to simply understanding lyrics or appreciating a musical genre. Its didactic stakes must be conceived as a bridge between cultures, offering the opportunity not only to discover the other, but also to discover oneself through this encounter. By exploring Francophone songs, learners can develop their intercultural understanding by becoming familiar with the values, perspectives and realities of French-speaking people around the world. By studying French songs, learners have the opportunity to explore their own cultural identity, question their prejudices and stereotypes and develop open-mindedness towards other cultures. They can identify themselves with the stories and emotions expressed in the songs; what can boost their self-esteem and sense of belonging to a wider community. In this sense, Amr argues that: "In a few minutes, it paints a portrait of a person or a society and can arouse emotions in learners, make them share experiences and revolts, convey a message, give them notions of history or geography and facilitate their access to learning a foreign language" (Amr quoted in Boza Araya, 2012: 198). This study builds on the work of J-L. Calvet, P. Dumont and M. Boiron who have already explored the potential role of Francophone song as a didactic and artistic tool for French

language learning, particularly for the development of intercultural skills of 1st year intermediate learners. The research questions that arise are therefore the following: What is the place of the Francophone song in the teaching of French as a foreign language in Algeria? What impact does it have on the early development of intercultural skills in 1st middle school learners? How do students generally react to the use of French songs in class? We assume that the use of song introduces cultural aspects of French-speaking countries, offering learners a broader perspective on the French-speaking world and reinforcing their interest in the French language. In the same way, the integration of song into the teaching of French as a foreign language in Algeria promotes the development of learners' linguistic skills, particularly with regard to listening and oral comprehension. To answer these questions, we present partial results of a questionnaire survey of 40 French teachers. In addition, we felt it necessary to set up an experimental sequence focusing on listening and comprehension of several French songs. Two tests were administered before and after the experimental protocol to assess students' degree of familiarity with French culture. The overall aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of using French songs as a pedagogical tool on the acquisition of intercultural skills in 1st year intermediate learners, and to provide some answers to the place of song in the teaching of FFL (French as a Foreign Language) in Algeria.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. *The intercultural approach in the new curricula*

Children grow up surrounded by songs and nursery rhymes, which contribute to the development of their first language as well as foreign languages. The official programs issued by the institution and the new accompanying documents for junior cycle teachers bear witness to the importance attached to openness towards others and intercultural competence. The reforms implemented in our education system since 2003 call into question previous linguistic and pedagogical policies, taking into account both national and global developments. A study of these documents enables us to identify the different aims of French language teaching in middle schools which revolves around training learners to be intercultural and open to the world through language. Indeed, the teaching/learning of a foreign language is based on linguistic, communicative and intercultural skills. The "Loi d'Orientation sur l'Éducation Nationale" (National Education Orientation Law) defines the aims of education as the following: "The Algerian school's vocation is to train citizens endowed with unquestionable national references, deeply attached to the values of the Algerian people, capable of understanding the world around them to adapt to it and act on it, and able to open up to universal civilisation" (Chapitre I, article 2, n°08-04 du 23 janvier 2008) (Chapter I, article 2, n°08-04 of January 23, 2008). In the context of education policy, the general aims of foreign language teaching can be defined as follows: "The teaching/learning of foreign languages must enable Algerian pupils to gain direct access to universal knowledge, and to open up to other cultures. [...] Foreign languages are taught as a means of communication, providing direct access to universal thought and stimulating fruitful interaction with national languages and cultures. They contribute to intellectual, cultural and technical training, and raise the level of competitiveness in the economic world" (cf. *Référentiel Général des Programmes*, 2009: 46.) (See *General Curriculum Reference*, 2009: 46). When teachers adeptly incorporate songs students are typically highly motivated. Songs and nursery rhymes have a relaxing effect, diversify the lesson structure, provide enjoyment and action, and foster harmony within oneself and the group (Murphey 1992: 8). Consequently, students learn while having fun and more effectively than without these forms.

Even shy or slower-learning children are encouraged to participate through singing or reciting in unison, which boosts their confidence in speaking a foreign language.

1.2. Song in service of the intercultural education

According to Le Petit Robert, a song is a "text set to music, usually structured with verses and choruses, intended to be sung" (Rey-Debove, Rey 1998: 343). It encompasses a variety of texts and melodies that reflect the culture of a community. In fact, "there are cultural reasons in favor of using songs in the classroom: people have the habit of singing and listening to songs that, in one way or another, evoke their realities, issues, history, and context. And since learning a language also involves an understanding of the civilization that gave rise to it and within which it evolves, the song is precisely at the intersection of these various paths" (Calvet 1980: 2). Songs are significant components of every culture. By learning from this authentic material, students gain insights into various aspects of a foreign culture. It satiates children's innate curiosity about everything new. Through becoming acquainted with songs in a foreign language, students develop a stronger connection to both the foreign culture and its language. When students hear the same melodies, they are struck by the parallels between their own culture and the foreign culture. This way, foreign cultures become not alarming or frightening, but intriguing and deserving of exploration. This represents a meaningful contribution to fostering tolerance and open-mindedness.

According to P. Gaëtane, the song is a "signifying micro-universe whose textual organization is closed and highly structured. It is a specific genre in which linguistic and extralinguistic elements are closely linked and can be combined" (Gaëtane, 1988, p. 8). These extralinguistic elements include rhythm, music and instruments. The song is an authentic teaching aid that can combine linguistic, artistic, musical and cultural codes. It plays an essential role in communication, sharing and cultural exchange thanks to its multicultural vision of the world that promotes dialogue between different nations and cultures. Introducing French-language songs into the intercultural education of foreign-language learners serves a dual purpose: On the one hand, it can be used for linguistic purposes, enabling students to explore various lexical, morphosyntactic and semantic aspects; on the other hand, it can be used as a didactic device to encourage interaction with the foreign culture. Its most important role lies in its ability to motivate learners as highlighted by E. Rassart: "Songs help to make language a real object of pleasure. What's more, it's an ideal teaching aid. Songs speak to all of us creating a bond appreciated by all ages, genders and even cultures" (Rassart, 2008). By being both universal and rooted in a specific culture, song represents one of the most effective tools for learning languages in a playful way by fostering understanding of others and of the world to which they belong. In this sense, J-L Calvet argues that "learning a language means learning or trying to learn a culture, and song is one of the elements that make up that culture [...] so it promotes knowledge of both individuals and cultural traits that make them special; therefore, learning a language is also learning the culture that speaks that language." (Calvet, 1977: 8). Song, like any other work of art, is considered an integral part of a society's cultural heritage. It is created from the influences and values of that society, and its role is to represent it at various levels. In this respect, Pierre Dumont declares that songs need to be rephrased and reinterpreted according to the needs and evolutions of society:

When a society reflects, its songs reflect, too. Oum Kalsoum was the most ideal expression of pan-Arabism and of Arab pride and unity; Fela Anikulapo Kuti embodied black Africa and resistance; Amalia Rodriguès embodied the fatum of a Portugal caught

up in its colonialist problems; we know that Piaf and Chevalier, and even today Juliette Gréco, embody a certain idea of France, including in the United States.

Dumont (1992: 98)

2. Methodology

In order to ascertain and evaluate teachers' opinions on the integration of Francophone songs into the teaching of French as a foreign language, we chose to conduct a questionnaire survey. Our sample consisted of 40 French teachers (13 men and 27 women) working in the junior cycle. All teachers received our questionnaire, but only 32 completed and returned it. This number represents a response rate of 80% of the target population. In addition, we suggested to the teacher of the 1st year middle class to integrate a few French songs as teaching aids for reading comprehension session and to address certain linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling. The songs chosen to integrate the cultural dimension are: a nursery rhyme entitled « Les Prénoms de Paris" (the prenomes of Paris by Jacques Brel); "Paris sera toujours Paris" (Paris will Always Be Paris by Zazie); Il est cinq heures, Paris s'élève" (It's five o'clock, Paris is rising); "Les copains d'abord (Friends First by Georges Brassens); "Paris" by Marc LAVOINE, "J'habite en France" (I live in France by Michel Sardou) ; Le Métèque" (The foreigner by Georges Moustaki); Le festin (The Feast by Camille). The songs selected to incorporate the cultural dimension encompass a diverse range of themes. "Les Prénoms de Paris" by Jacques Brel presents a poetic exploration of the various names and personalities that define the eclectic population of Paris. "Paris sera toujours Paris" by Zazie encapsulates the unwavering allure of Paris, highlighting its timeless charm and inimitable essence. The phrase "Il est cinq heures, Paris s'élève" captures the early morning vitality of the city in a song by Jacques Dutronc. "Les copains d'abord" by Georges Brassens extols the importance of friendship and camaraderie in life. "Paris" by Marc Lavoine likely delves into the emotional significance of the city. Michel Sardou's "J'habite en France" provides a personal reflection on life in France. Finally, "Le Métèque" by Georges Moustaki offers insight into the experiences of immigrants and outsiders, addressing themes of identity, belonging, and cultural integration. Collectively, these songs provide a multifaceted exploration of France, Paris, and the diverse lives of its inhabitants and visitors.

3. Results of the questionnaire survey

3.1. The Socio-Professional Characteristics of the Observed Teachers

Table 1: The Socio-Professional Characteristics of the Teachers

<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than 5 years	3	4	7
From 6 to 10 years	5	3	8
From 11 to 15 years	4	0	4
From 16 to 20 years	7	5	12
TOTAL	20	12	32

The table provided illustrates the distribution of teaching experience among the observed teachers, there are 20 women and 12 men among the observed teachers, with a total of 32 teachers. These figures highlight various patterns of teaching experience distribution across genders, showcasing both balanced and imbalanced ratios in different experience ranges.

3.2. Teachers' statements concerning intercultural teaching

Question number 6 asked teachers whether they discussed France and its culture in their lessons. The results show that almost all teachers (90%) recognize that they do not specifically address topics related to French culture in French lessons. According to their statements, their main concern is to follow course content and progression in order to respect the objectives of the official program. In addition, middle school curricula do not place sufficient emphasis on French culture, and Algerian culture is largely dominant. However, some teachers add that learning a language must necessarily include learning about its civilization and cultural heritage. The language course has to meet this requirement because every language conveys a culture, as one teacher commented: "Most of the time, I'm forced to concentrate on the progress of the lessons. Unfortunately, current school curricula don't place enough emphasis on French culture. As teachers of French, we recognize the importance of learning the language in its cultural context." Another teacher shared his view saying: "We strive to find pedagogical means and tools to incorporate elements of French culture, such as Francophone music, into our teaching activities; what will enable students to develop a deeper understanding of the language."

3.3. The effects of representations on FFL learning

The data collected for question 9 indicate that all teachers agree that students' representations of the French language have a significant impact on their motivation to learn French. The teachers interviewed emphasize that ignorance of the culture conveyed by the language, or the existence of stereotyped images, can be a major obstacle to the successful appropriation of French as a foreign language. The image of the enemy, the West or the non-Muslim is ingrained in the minds and memories of our students; what explains why some of them reject the French language. Furthermore, the majority of students prefer English which they consider easier than French.

3.4. Introduction of song into the FLE classroom

By analyzing the answers to question n°12, we examined whether teachers optimize the use of French songs in the FLE classroom. We noted a significant number of teachers (86%) who answered negatively to this question, explaining that songs are not a privileged document for teaching FFL. They think that working with this type of medium is difficult in overcrowded classrooms. What's more, the level of the pupils is often too low to offer them songs in a foreign language. Only four teachers said they would have integrated songs if classes were equipped with IT tools such as video projectors or headphones. One teacher shared: "My students' level of French is still limited for working with foreign-language songs. They need to consolidate their linguistic foundations before they can fully appreciate and understand the lyrics and music. Then, if we have the necessary resources, I'd be willing to explore this pedagogical approach."

3.4. Using of French songs in the FLE classroom

Question 13 was designed to determine the aspects to which teachers attach more importance in their teaching of French songs. We awarded points for each aspect (6 points for the first aspect, 5 points for the second one, etc.) and calculated the average which ranged from 1 (minimum) to 6 (maximum). For the vast majority of teachers, the development of oral and written comprehension is considered as the most important aspect of studying French songs, followed by oral and written expression. Syntax and vocabulary come third; however,

correct pronunciation ranks fourth. On the other hand, all the teachers stated that they were not interested in discovering the other's culture and the distractive side of the songs during their analysis.

3.5. Students' reactions to the use of songs in class

The integration of French songs into the classroom often diverse and positive reactions from students. Songs are a dynamic and engaging way to introduce language and culture simultaneously, creating an immersive learning experience. When students encounter music that reflects the cultural nuances of the target language, they tend to respond with heightened interest and enthusiasm. Many find the rhythm and melody of songs memorable, which aids in vocabulary retention and pronunciation practice. Furthermore, songs provide context for idiomatic expressions, colloquial language, and cultural references that textbooks may not cover comprehensively. This exposure to authentic language use fosters a deeper understanding of the culture, making the learning process more relatable and enjoyable. The students enjoyed the discussions that took place as part of the group work on translating songs in order to interpret the cultural messages contained in the songs. In other words, songs are an effective tool not only for improving language skills, but also for creating an attractive atmosphere.

3.6. Songs use in French as a Foreign Language, in light of technological advancements

According to most of the interviewed teachers, digital technologies already offer new possibilities to enhance the pedagogical experience by integrating music and songs interactively. The use of applications, online platforms, and multimedia tools will enable teachers to create diverse and engaging activities centered around songs, while adapting to learners' preferences and skills. One of the teachers say: "Students appreciate the opportunity to discover songs and artists from various French-speaking regions through the internet. This broadens their cultural and linguistic understanding. I often ask them to research information about the artists and the contexts of the songs, which stimulates their curiosity and information-seeking."

3.7. Song use and translation

According to the teachers' responses, translating songs visibly stimulates pupils' intellectual curiosity. By deciphering the lyrics and reflecting on the linguistic choices made by the artists, students develop their ability to analyse and think critically. Wordplay, metaphors and nuances of translation encourage them to explore the many facets of language, enriching their vocabulary and contextual understanding. Translating songs in the language classroom is not just about language, it's also a very effective tool for combining language, culture and the emotions of the learners. One teacher said: "I often translate songs into Arabic to give my pupils a better understanding of the lyrics and theme of the song. In addition, this strategy also helps to improve their language skills and develop a deeper understanding of the foreign culture in relation to their own."

3.8. Results of the experimental sequence

The research we undertook was carried out with 1st year junior cycle pupils in a class made up of 41 pupils, mainly aged 12. Its aim was to make the experimental group aware of the role that Francophone songs can play in the appropriation of cultural aspects in the FLE classroom. To do this, several activities were proposed (oral and written comprehension

activities, language exercises and oral and written expression activities). During this experimental sequence, the participants were invited to take part in several activities to develop their understanding of the target language and culture.

Table 2: Sequence of experiment

Session	Content	Objective
Session 1 30mn	Written expression 1 : Write a short paragraph describing France and French people.	Identifying students' perceptions of France and French people
Session 2 30mn	Study and analysis of songs "Il est cinq heures, Paris s'élève " ("It's five o'clock, Paris is rising") ; "Les Prénoms de Paris" (the prenomes of Paris by Jacques Brel); "Paris sera toujours Paris" (Paris will Always Be Paris by Zazie); "Les copains d'abord (Friends First by Georges Brassens). Activity 1: I listen to the song and fill in the missing words. Activity 2: I listen to the song, read the text and answer the questions.	Comparing the other's culture to your own. Studying the main features of France's capital. Identifying the cultural references conveyed by the two songs.
Session 3 1 hour	Analysis of the song "Paris" by Marc Lavoine, "J'habite en France" (I live in France by Michel Sardou); Le Métèque" (the foreigner by Georges Moustaki), Le festin (The Feast by Camille). Activity: I listen to the song, read the lyrics, and then note all the words or expressions that describe French people.	Characterizing France and the French through the eyes of an Other. Identifying gastronomy.
Session 4 1 hour	Written expression 2: Write a short paragraph describing France and French people.	Identifying different representations of France and French people.

This didactic sequence aims to explore cultural representations of France and French people through the analysis of French songs. The proposed activities aim to develop students' oral and written comprehension, compare cultures, identify the cultural references conveyed by the songs and characterize the French through the eyes of others. The sessions also include moments of written expression in which students are invited to describe France and French people according to the representations they have acquired.

Table 2: Evolution of representations

Category	Words identified: 1st written expression	Words identified: 2nd written expression
French life	15	24
Français	9	19
History	8	16
Places	10	11
Monuments	8	14
Culture	11	16
Gastronomy	1	5
Miscellaneous	19	32
Total	73	137

Analysis of the above data highlights the number of words recorded in two different writing contexts. In the first written expression, the "Miscellaneous" category stands out with 19 words, reflecting the diversity of the subjects under discussion. "French Life" and

"Culture" came next, with 15 and 11 words respectively. The "History", "Places" and "French" categories also have a notable presence; while the "Monuments" category is the least represented with just 3 words. In contrast, the second written expression shows a significant increase in the number of words counted in each category. The "Miscellaneous" category remains predominant with 25 words, illustrating an even greater pronounced diversity in the subjects under discussion. The "French Life" category also saw a significant increase, with 24 words, closely followed by "Culture" with 16 words. The "Monuments" category has increased considerably with 14 words, indicating a particular focus on this aspect. The "History" and "Places" categories show a moderate presence with 15 and 11 words respectively. Overall, the second written expression reveals a greater richness and diversity of the topics with a particular focus on French life, culture and monuments.

4. Discussion

The place of French songs in the teaching of French as a foreign language in Algeria is evolving positively, although their presence in textbooks remains limited due to copyright constraints. However, easy access to audio supports and online resources has encouraged its use. French song offers learners an authentic cultural immersion, enabling them to develop their language skills by discovering the cultural diversity of French-speaking countries. The use of French song as a pedagogical tool encourages openness to cultural diversity, to the development of a plurilingual and intercultural identity, and to the establishment of links between the learners' culture and that of French-speaking countries. In addition, analyzing the lyrics of French-language songs raises learners' awareness of the values and realities of French-speaking countries, promoting intercultural dialogue. Teachers expressed the need to integrate French song more fully into their teaching, stressing its potential to reinforce learners' cultural identity, to transform negative representations and to foster understanding of the other. Analysis of the students' written productions revealed a clear improvement and a great curiosity to discover French culture. This is why it is vital for the institution to reaffirm the importance of interculturality in the teaching of FFL. This would provide learners with linguistic skills associated with relevant cultural elements by encouraging their understanding of others and their ability to analyze cultural values with a relativistic eye. By integrating French culture through song, learners develop a deeper understanding of French daily life, traditions, history, art and literature. This broadens their worldview, stimulates their interest in language and country, and fosters their open-mindedness and ability to interact with other cultures. Francophone song, as an artistic and linguistic form, offers a rich potential for enriching the teaching of French as a foreign language and promoting intercultural dialogue.

Conclusion

In the teaching of civilization, the song represents a valuable pedagogical tool that allows learners to engage with the culture of the target language. Our objective is to raise learners' awareness of various Francophone cultures by using songs as a reflection of the societies in which they were created. Nowadays, songs occupy a legitimate place in the teaching of French as a foreign language, even if they are rarely included in textbooks due to copyright constraints. The democratization of audio supports and technological advances, particularly the Internet, has encouraged this increased use. Indeed, songs and all the media that accompany them, such as video clips, lyrics websites and CD, covers and interviews with artists are more accessible than ever. From this point of view, French chanson should

be studied and analyzed in the same way as all other artistic fields by taking into account its specificity. In conclusion, the analysis of songs in the FFL classroom proves to be a powerful tool for exploring and deepening the cultural aspects of French society and Francophone cultural diversity, thus reinforcing learners' motivation and fostering their commitment to language learning. Finally, we align with the statement of Calvet who says, "There are cultural arguments in favor of using songs in the classroom: people sing and listen to songs that, in one way or another, speak about them, their problems, their history, their situation. And if learning a language also means learning a bit about the civilization that gave birth to that language and in which it exists, the song is precisely at the intersection of these different paths." (Calvet, 1980 : 2).

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