

EXPLORING THE LEARNING OF LANGUAGE THROUGH GLOBAL DANCE AND MUSIC: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research paper explores theories behind Total Physical Response (T.P.R) methods and psychology by associating them with music in order to examine the role of listening to music and dancing in language learning. This research utilises the five pillars of Zumba (music, dance, the power of now, enjoyment, and relaxing) that may create an environment for motivating language fluency learning and investigates whether these pillars have the potential for making Zumba, a global phenomenon in teaching languages. Studies depicting how listening to music facilitates foreign language learning will be outlined. This is a personal form of ethnographic research requiring the participant researcher to investigate the role of music and dance in increasing learner motivation learning the English language.

Keywords: education, music, dance, Zumba, global genres, enjoyment and language learning, fluency in language, SLA

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning secondary language is important in a globalized era. Language learners spend time practicing a target language for reaching a satisfactory level of fluency even though much of language acquisition comes from hearing (Zaraysky, 2009: 284). Thus, listening to a 'target' language is very essential for learners who want to become competent speakers of second language. One particular difficulty associated with the complexity of learning new languages is related to learning tools, which do not use movements and music as motivators but instead alter a learner's appeal for learning. This article uses Zumba music as a tool showing the possibility of using global music for both learning and teaching languages based on TPR (Total Physical Response) methods. Various studies, which will be outlined in this article have shown satisfactory findings on the topic of using music and movements to improve language skills, but no specific study exists which shows that creating a self-learning language environment within which learners can create and adapt new learning approaches through music, movement, thoughts and joy can help create unlimited possibilities to learn a new language. The paper does not use any participants for this study. Instead, it is a broad literary review and collection of individual discussions whose future aim is to design a learning system that provides effective global teaching materials and a psychological guide to helping language teachers and learners change their traditional approach to teaching the acquisition of secondary languages.

1.1. Zumba background

Zumba is a fitness dance developed by Columbian trainer, Alberto Beto Perez, and has spread over all 185 inhabited countries (Zumb.com).The term 'globalization' in Zumba applies to the transformation of Latin culture into American culture and its blending with other cultures .Latin music has little effect on American music only in unrelated changes other than the degree to which Latin music affects American music actually causes the change in American music. Latin music seems to have an influence on the popular music styles of the United States by integrating the idioms of Brazil, Cuba, or Mexico that affect the U.S.'s popular music, (Roberts, 1998: 37). Now that the globalization of Zumba has come to be universally accepted, Zumba's growth shows how inexorable the globalization of Zumba dances and songs have become, leading to more opportunities for singers around the world to create new songs and blend

Zumba with their traditional dances using English. This article is aimed towards exploring the possibility of using Zumba as a new way for motivating language learning which is encapsulated by three research questions as the basis for this research as follows:

1.2. Research Questions

1. How do theories behind Total Physical Response (T.P.R) and psychology support the use of music and dance in language learning?
2. How does music lead the brain into an enjoyment and relaxation state enabling the flexibility of language learning?
3. What is the relationship between the power of 'now' and language learning?

2. METHODOLOGY

This ethnographic research is used as a self-narrative inquiry into the concepts of brain psychology in learning languages through music, joy, movements, and being in the 'now'. It also explores of the impact of learning and knowledge represented in Zumba fitness classes and how it relates to the language-learning field. Many elements of psychological thoughts, brain thoughts and Total Physical Response (T.P.R.) thoughts were connected to my personal enquiry as participant researcher in a city centre Zumba fitness class based in Limerick, Ireland. Billboard articles and Zumba magazines were the main sources that provide up-to-date information about Zumba songs and activities used in this article. Based on using these sources formulates the findings my understanding of the role of the Zumba environment and materials in learning language.

2.1. Theories associated with Total Physical Response (T.P.R)

Learning languages as a concept today has become universally favoured despite the fact as Bamgbose (2001:357) points out, 'we live in a multilingual world' and pointing to the obvious need for other languages in everyday communication. Globalisation is becoming a common phenomenon increasing the needs of multilingualism. Today, more people want to survive through communicating with others from all around the world. An automatic movement of language learning is happening as a result of working, studying abroad and immigrating as well as using the Internet, whereby the notion exists of the more languages an individual speaks, the more knowledge and possibilities people will possess (Zaraysky, 2009). In this globalised era, everyone dreams to program his or her brain to learn languages. The Total Physical Response (T.P.R.) theory (Morretta,& Grazi, 2004) is based on the assumption that the human mind has a nervous system that is biologically designed to absorb the mother tongue language. Nowadays, this theory may be combined with the psychological approach that supports the concept of infinite possibilities of the human brain for learning (Deepak Chopra and Rudolph Tanzi, 2012)

'Self-aware questions are the key that make consciousness expand, and when this happens, the possibilities are infinite' (Deepak Chopra, 2012:87). When learners believe in themselves, the questions they can ask about their ability to learn and speak new languages and how one thinks and feels, have no limit. Self-aware beliefs in brains and abilities to speak languages are also keys that make consciousness expand. When that happens, the possibilities of learning languages are infinite .Learning new languages involves using the brain by asking it to listen to new vocabulary, new songs, and new wisdoms every day in a foreign language. The brain is always open to learning what a person is seeking. Understanding the language of the brain has beneficial effects in employing brain functions for learning languages. The commands and instructional language as Asher (Morretta,& Grazi, 2004) asserts are language-body conversations used to construct biological programming of the brain to acquire language. For example, a child listens to orders and responds with action. The tendency of the brain to listen to orders and commands is a natural mechanism which adults can use to program their brain and encourage it to learn a new language. Deepak Chopra and Tanzi (2012: 4) claim that the person can act as a leader. In order to integrate this idea with Asher's beliefs, involves preparing a brain to learn a foreign language as a leader, say, learning tasks or orders like a leader in directive forms and singing it to any global hit song, like "the Cup of life by Martin," and "Gangnam Style". Using instructional language with learners of a second language in a classroom offers understandable input for students to make them communicate via the language. Teachers can sing instructions to students in classrooms by 'putting directives for mundane tasks to music which relieves monotony and extends learning' (Olliphant, 2013:203). The musical communication method is the way of communicating between the teacher and learner which can be

practiced every day in classroom settings. Therefore, it is worthwhile and encouraging that learners be interested in learning languages.

Another communication technique that a teacher uses to converse with students and make interaction more successful is through using body language. Dickson (1989:302) claims that ‘communication not only involves language and sound production but also includes gestures, facial expressions, and body positions’. In Zumba fitness classes, communication through body language is significant involving Zumba participants and instructors listening to songs and answering them with physical actions. An association exists between the body and the movement that are directed by song and learners imitating the instructor’s steps. For instance, the song “All around the World” by Paulina Rubio was played in class involving all participants spreading their hands and turning around in circles and spinning when they heard “all around the world”. When the song mentions, “We’re rocking and rolling like crazy, eh, all the way”, they moved and swayed from side-to-side with rapturous emotions turning over and over and moving their heads like crazy. They leapt energetically with excitement moving feet and body at the same time when they hear “jump up, we dance”. The patterns of the participants dance steps are equivalent to the songs’ words and instructions. The new comers of Zumba interpret the song language through observing and watching the body movement made by Zumba instructors. The performances of both instructors and participants bring song language to have actual meaning and an indication they understand the musical words. It could be said that using Zumba songs for second language learning assists them with learning because it provides listening practice that is combined with physical exercises and movements. Mastering these movements takes time and comes gradually as the participants of Zumba dance keep practicing. For certain individuals, this can take weeks and sometimes months depending on their level of alertness or attentiveness. Child language development applies the same process of adopting dancing movements and sing-song words. For example, mothers singing to their babies when breast-feeding leading to the children singing their mothers’ songs by themselves. Even from personal experience, I remember listening to my mum’s song called “Rain” and after listening to it so many times, I started to sing it and the words of the song are still in my memory.

In order to learn language, the brain proceeds through periods of emotional interaction, watching, observing, imitating and listening to the language and in the phase of silence meaning the child relates to and ‘feels’ the language before they speak. The child makes intelligible utterances in the mother language, after as Mauro, Morretta and Grazi (2014: 1503) states ‘internalizes the form and the sounds of the mother tongue in silence’ as an adult focusing on the moment and being self-aware of the language in the brain is a way of becoming your own best friend who uses his or her brain to open possibilities of learning languages. Willingness plays a vital role in the process of learning a new language started by ‘feeling’ and ‘imagining’ the language in the brain. Language learners need to open themselves as children to absorb input and integrate it with sensation, image, feeling, thinking to create the whole picture of understanding. Learners need to SIFT (Sensation, Image, Feeling and Thought) (Siegel, 2007) through the data of information.

According to Siegel (2007:19), ‘as one becomes aware of sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts (SIFT), one identifies these activities of the mind as a form of waves at the surface of the mental lobe seen from this deeper place within one’s mind. This internal space of mindful awareness can be noticed as brain waves at the surface as they come and go’. Music is an external stimulus that provides the brain with words and sounds. If the music combines with movements, the sensing with eyes elicits mental images to the brain. In addition, the conscious awareness of body movements and melodies will be felt in the inside of the body through reaction of dancing that result from feelings of excitements. Wan and Schlaug (2010: 567) state that ‘listening to songs or even playing music has been known to provoke emotions in addition to increasing interpersonal communications and interactions’ whereby the positive feelings can be described like a motor filling the brain with good thoughts. There are possibly parallels between the S.I.F.T concept, Total Physical Response (T.P.R.) theory; Zumba dance activities and learning a second language. This concept is considered a helpful notion to simplify the stages of understanding the image of language activities in the brain and linked with an important objective of the Total Physical Response (T.P.R) by asserting that children create mental images of the language through the listening process. The observation that I propose shows that Zumba dance activities most likely make participants go through SIFT stages:

2.2. Sensations to Songs

The Zumba class may be a suitable environment for learning a language because the content includes visual, auditory and motor information which are mapped to the mirror system responsible for understanding actions, learning skills by imitation and decoding language. Relating to my experience in Zumba classes as a new participant, I started dancing without understanding the lyrics but giving attention to song rhythms in different languages to harmonise my body movements with the song. I just listened to songs with my ears, watching the instructor's steps with my eyes, felt the song and moved my body through tapping, clapping, rolling, and jumping. With time all my sensations integrated with the song and the multi-sensory process of Zumba training enhancing my language skills. On commencement of Zumba classes, the instructor and participants undertake warm-up routines that release tension using two songs to warm up preparing the body for the main exercise. The first couple of minutes are general involving slow exercises starting with head-up and toes and then proceeding to using more intensive steps and choreography. Engaging in warm up exercises can be advantageous to language learners where it can assist and increase their attention to the language (Dickson, 1989: 302). Several songs can be used from Zumba in English language classes to warm up students as well as expose them to the language due to directions being given in English e.g. AC/DC "Thunderstruck" by Razors Edge, used in Zumba classes a well-known song played at the beginning of sporting events. All participants in Zumba classes follow the directions of the instructor given in English to do Merengue march warm-up routines as described in **Appendix 1**.

In the Zumba class, participants use many senses and watch the instructors feel, hear and dance by using multi-sensory skills. The brain's adaptation of "hearing-doing", seeing-doing and "action-observations" can enhance oral and listening skills. For example, in Singapore, music is used as a way for young Asian kids to enrich their vocabulary and improve their oral skills in English and understanding. The National Institute of Education, Singapore developed the E.L.M (Expressive Language and Music) project for combining the teaching of language with musical contexts and dance activities using communicative approaches during three phases. The first phase, musical activities, focused on getting children to become acquainted with each other by having them sing or chant greetings and responding to each other through phrases and songs. The second phase is aimed at enhancing auditory awareness by exposing children to songs, rhymes and recording them singing individually. The stories and songs are used as a medium to introduce the theme of the week activities e.g. "The Cuckoo" song and "Goodnight Owl" introduced the topic on birds. The final phase, revision, involves the children acting all stories and songs they had learned. The results show that using music enhanced children's social, language and musical skills and also achieved an acceptable level of fluency in communication. (Gain and Chong, 1998). A visualization of lyrics of the target language in the head is a method which helps language learners use their brain in learning and constructing the understanding of the language (Zaraysky, 2009). Imaging provides a visual picture of ideas and vocabulary around a song. Two M.R.I scan experiments carried out by Hinkle and Hirsch sought to investigate the activities of one patient on two specific occasions. The first M.R.I scan was carried out on the patient while listening to a song entitled "Diversions" by Joseph Horowitz while the second M.R.I scan was carried out whilst the patient was 'imagining' the lyrics of the song in his head. When both scans were compared, it was revealed that more parts of the brain were activated and lit up by 'imagining' music in the head, rather than listening to it. (Zaraysky, 2009: 573 – 574) supports this view by stating 'the imagined music comes from the frontal lobe, the part of the brain that coordinates higher mental functions and working memory'.

2.3. Personal Experience

In the past, I attended Zumba classes in Limerick, Ireland. After these classes, I asked my instructors to furnish me with the name of the song that caught my attention and whose dance patterns I felt easy to follow. When I got home, I searched for the song-name on a computer, listened to it, printed out the lyrics and imagined these lyrics in my head. For example, one particular song "The Ghostbuster" by Ray Parker speaks about Ghostbusters who can help people to feel good. I imagined that I was in bed and waking up in the middle of the night looking from the window. The region around and its inhabitation were full of strange faces and customs. Weird sounds were heard everywhere and seeing things running around in my head. There was an invisible man sleeping in my bed. I saw frightened ghost babies and plenty of ghosts around me who made me afraid, so I called Ghostbuster to help me. According to my experience a relationship exists between the visual image of lyrics and brain functions which are associated with

learning from memorisation. I use my imagination to display large amounts of information in brain memory and by making connections I also understand the relationships amongst ideas.

2.4. Feeling the language

Siegel (2007) suggests that mind, brain and relationship are connected in a triangle which shape and affect our learning, mental functions and life experience, based on the following ideas: (a) the brain is full of neurons which are influenced by experience; (b) the experience means neural ‘firing’ in the brain shaped by feeling, imagining or doing and responding to a stimulus and (c) taking in a message which involves ‘firing’ the neurons and wiring them together. Siegel states that the brain is a social organ of the body who regards learning as a social activity. Referring to Siegel beliefs about language acquisition, I believe if a language learner listens to the sound of words or even imagines them and he or she likes how they sound / look, the latter will make an association between the perception of the sound and its pronunciation, image and its feeling. In this case, the person listens to it again and again reinforcing the learning, a skill which comes with practice. In order to improve skills of language learning, the brain needs to form a relationship with information, feeling and sounds that linked with image or movements.

2.5. Enjoyment, relaxation and language learning

Music and dance increase the pleasure and create an encouraging learning environment for language learners. The value of fostering and enhancing memory of learning language through listening to joyful music and dancing is vital. Zaraysky state that ‘dancing along to a song makes it more fun and when movement is coordinated to words in a song, it is easier for a person to remember the words. Songs like “YMCA”, “La Macarena” and “Gangnam Style” have become super popular because specific body movements are associated for each verse, that people perform worldwide’ (Zaraysky,2009:622). Listening to music played an important role in mental stimulation of memory-motivated learning. Listening to enjoyable songs stimulate mygdale is responsible for a process of emotions in the brain (Zaraysky2009: 465) also supports this view by indicating “the more emotionally that one is connected to a song, the greater the chance one will remember the lyrics and melody”.

2.6. The power of being in the ‘now’ and language learning

‘Clock time’ and ‘psychological time’ are two terms used by Eckhart Tolle (2001) for the purposes of describing ‘now’ and language learning. ‘Clock time’ means giving attention to the present moment by feeling the joy and the ease of this moment .However, ‘psychological time’ as associated with living thoughts and the life of the past or future. Many language learners are absent in the psychological time as they want to speak quickly and they are racing to learn languages. Described simple, they do not ‘live’ the process of language learning and suffer from tension and stress during this process. As Tolle (2001: 387) states, “stress is caused by being ‘here’ but wanting to be ‘there’ or being in the ‘present’, but wanting to be in the future”. Language learners who are in ‘clock time’ means giving full attention to the moment of learning and taking the adventure of language learning moments by directing the attention to one action of learning language in the present moment (Tolle, 2001: 328).

In Zumba class, participants are passionate about moment-to-moment learning experiences that try improving learning potentially. The participants live the present moment, experience dancing while listening to music. The atmosphere of the class aspires them to move to learning and singing. Participants concentrate on the steps and directions and with constant attention; they can see their improvement. In Zumba class it is very difficult to get lost in the distractions of life and helps release participants from suffering stress at work, in relationships and in families. Being in Zumba classes means a person is ‘here’ and ‘now’. When participants are in the moment of the dance, they move and feel the flow of energy in their body in a state called “Be Learn Now”. The mind is ready and present to observe, watch, practice listening to songs and fulfilling movements. An important result of being in the ‘moment’ of learning is the absence of stress. Morretta and Grzi (2014: 1606) “indicate the key to learning without stress involves respecting the natural biological programming for language development and then returning to the relaxing and pleasurable experience which accompanies the learning of a first language, by concentrating on interpreting this meaning through movement rather than through abstractly linguistically forms”.

2.7. Thoughts and Reflections

It is important for learners to know that he or she is the master of their brain and has the power to control thoughts and fill it with motivated affirmations which are the source of inspiration (Hay, 1984). Every moment, as a ‘leader’ of learning, fills the mind with intense desirable thoughts for learning a

foreign language and giving orders to the brain to what tasks one really wants in language learning e.g. listening to songs and singing to. Every order, thought, or instruction which is placed in a person's brain will appear in physical life (Mike, Dooley, 2009) Learners should stop sending negative thoughts or orders related to the learning ability of the brain and change all their negative ideas to positive affirmations. Hay (1984:76) makes one point which is very important to consider 'when a person is giving statements to the brain by making your statements in the present tense to your subconscious mind e.g. "I am", "I have"'.

From the above, the first total 'physical' objective maintains, 'language is acquired through a linear route in which there is first comprehension and after production' (Mauro Morretta 2014: 1509). One possible method of starting to learn a language is by listening. Speaking fluently is a result of everyday listening practice whereas listening to foreign language music has often meant the improvement of speaking skills (Zaraysky, 2009). By listening takes learners on a road to learning a new language. Once time is given to listening to any language, a direct result of listening leads to speaking the language. Learners using 'pure' listening to the sounds of new languages meaning they can succeed in experiencing the actual reality of engaging in learning new languages. Zaraysky mentions in her book a research study carried out by, Ferrira and Overy (2009: 311) placed sixty language students randomly into three learning situations that exposed them to Hungarian phrases in different conditions. The first condition, involved students listening to normal Hungarian speech and repetition, the second condition, involved them listening to rhythmic speaking and repeating it, while the third condition, involved exposing students to Hungarian phrases in songs and asking them to repeat them. The results found those participants in the singing condition showed superior overall performance on a collection of Hungarian language tests after a 15 minute learning period, compared to participants in the speaking and rhythmic speaking conditions. In addition, training the learner and understanding of language in different ways which the brain works, boosted comprehension of language input and resulted in producing language in speaking form. Learning a foreign language should construct the mental 'image' of the language through listening exercises that is used in combination with movements, enhancing the ability of the brain to learn how to use the language. Music is a way of learning a language by experience that integrates body, mind and emotions

3. CONCLUSION

Language learning is a collection of feelings, thoughts and imaginations of the second language in the brain. It is a meditation and an observation of the second language leading to a high level of concentration that speeds up learning and language production. Language creation happens when learners engage and connect language with sensations, movements and music that are considered as 'brain fuel'. Effective language learning means connecting language learners with the moment of learning and engaging second language learners with feelings of joy by tapping and clipping whilst learning. It means getting rid of negative thoughts that are related to unlimited possibilities of the brain in language learning and embracing new positive ideas that shape everyday improvement of language skills. It means building relationships with the brain by exposing it to language through enjoyable music. It is not memorising whatever one was taught to write and copying what had been memorised. It is about treating the brain as a social organ rather than as a code. Second language learner's needed to have full consciousness of their brains aspects, functions and provide it with stimulations that meet these needs. This research utilises a mixture of psychological and Total Physical Response (T.P.R.) theories in its discussion that finds its beliefs and encourages the creation of materials that make learning languages through Zumba dancing. It perhaps opens up new windows for exploring Zumba global music to create educational tools and materials that involve movement, music, joy, relaxation, by focusing on learning specific moments. It also encourages the development of teaching materials that use Zumba songs and provides support for exploring how teachers can use music and dance for teaching languages? In addition, creating self-learning exercises that prepare the brain to adapt positive beliefs about learning languages can be another future research theme.

APPENDIX

Warm-up routines

Place your feet on the floor, bent the right knee and switch

Notice, when one knee is bent the opposite hip goes up

Begin marching steps, the knee that is bent stepping

Hang your hands around, as you like

Now enjoy it show me your favourite style.

The Reggaeton bounce instructions are as follows:

Place your feet on the floor, step the right one out and bring them together and tap.

Step the right one out and twist both feet and bring them together and tap nice and easy.

Now twist both feet and bring them together fast.

Keep your back forward.

Give some arms join your elbow as hard you twist your feet the elbows go back.

Keep going do not stop, get into it.

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