
The Song as an Unconventional Teaching Method for Foreign Languages

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Abstract: Long ignored in the teaching of foreign languages, the song is considered, even today, as a too insignificant genre to be seriously studied. So, what songs the teacher can present to students and what can he do with them? In our paper we try to present an activity of understanding and exploitation of a French authentic sound document: «Avoir trente ans» (“Being thirty years”), composed and performed by the famous French singer and songwriter – Yves Duteil. The song is a whole, an ensemble of music, words and performing, which are combined, closely bound. Beyond the grammatical meaning, everything in the song helps us perceive and perform it. By leaning on the text of the song, the students are led to enter the “world” of the text by the guided and progressive identification of grammatical and lexical elements, in order to understand its significant structure and decipher the deep message of the author. The song helps the students directly take over, by themselves, the text of the song, in order to express and communicate, in a creative way, the emotions and feelings that it gave birth into them, from a listening situation. Thus, it would be desirable to choose songs which suggest an atmosphere or express an engagement (ideological, amorous, etc.) which provokes emotions, feelings or sensations that we would like to be communicated. Activities and games of type we present in the paper seem to give encouraging results to develop the desire of talking and communicating in the classroom.

Keywords: French Grammar, Lexical Elements, Audio Document, Unconventional Teaching Method, Student’s Creativity

1. Introduction

The origin of the songs is also fun and educational: children sing to learn to speak, to dress, to recognize objects, colors, briefly to discover and organize the world [1-4]. But, if this didactic function is evident in the children’s songs, it is much less so in the songs “of adults”, where we must learn to discover it [1, 5-7]. A song is a whole, a set where music, lyrics and performance are combined and interrelated.

Beyond the grammatical meaning, in a song everything helps us perceive and interpret it. As a specific language activity, the song has its rules. Through listening and interpretation strategies, it is the language teacher who has to make his students discover these rules, by guiding them in their work [8].

A song allows at any time to take part in the game which consists in recognizing *who* is speaking, *how*, *about what*, through the verbal achievement of the enunciations – which always corresponds to the individual trial of appropriation of

a foreign language [9-11]. Therefore, among various language activities, especially the song seems to lend itself to teaching a foreign language [12-16].

The enunciation being the dominant feature of its discursive structure, the song must especially attract attention to the modalities of enunciation. Moment by moment, it underlines the kind of verbal exchange that takes place, affecting the sensitivity of the listener, its true recipient. The listener is led to discover a message that is not in words, but beyond them.

To illustrate this type of comprehension activity of an authentic sound text, we chose the Yves Duteil’s song – *Avoir trente ans (Being thirty years)* (Table 1) [17]. There were proposed as linguistic objectives the followings: the developing oral comprehension with an extension to an exercise on the emphasis and, as cultural purpose, the problem of age and, in particular the thirties as seen by Yves Duteil [18, 19].

2. Study of the Song

1. Play the song and ask students to identify the theme.
2. Because the song does not have special problems of understanding, it can be listened to again and also distribute to the students sheets with the text of the song.
3. Ask students to underline / extract from the text:
 - a) expressions containing the word *temps* (time) and then, together, process them (dictionaries can be used):
 1. *on se moque de l'air du temps* (we laugh at the air of time)

To find another formulation: *on ne se soucie pas du temps qui passe* (we do not care about the passing time). But in fact, *vivre de l'air du temps* (live the air of time) means *être sans ressources, ne pas avoir de moyens d'existence* (be without resources, have no livelihood) and only in this expression one usually speaks of *l'air du temps* (the air of time).

1. *on a le temps de voir venir la vieillesse* (we have time to see old age coming)

It means that *la vieillesse est encore loin* (old age is still far away). One can clarify here the meaning of *voir venir* (see coming):

1. wait quietly, observing the evolution of events;
 - E.g. 1. We have time *voir venir* (to see coming): one does not need to act immediately; we can see what will happen.
 - E.g. 2. He has enough money for *voir venir* (seeing coming): to avoid being caught out.

1. *voir venir* quelqu'un (see someone coming): guess his intentions
2. *la légende a fait son temps* (legend has had its day)

Infer from the context the meaning of this expression: the legend is exceeded, no longer believes. In the song, find an equivalent expression for: *la légende a fait long feu* (the legend has fizzled). These two expressions are, however, not synonyms:

1. *faire son temps* (make his time) means *être périmé, dépassé* (to be outdated, obsolete);

E.g. This device / this method had its day; we no longer use it today, it is old-fashioned.

1. *faire long feu* (fizzle) is the idea of failure, of not achieving his goal;

E.g. This joke has backfired: it no longer has effect.

But attention: in the negative, this expression has a different meaning: *ne pas faire long feu* = *ne pas durer longtemps* (not fizzle = not last long).

1. *gravir les marches du temps* (climb the stairs of time = getting old);

b) expressions designating periods of life:

1. *les printemps qui se posent sur nos épaules* (springs that alight on our shoulders)

These are the years. *Le printemps* (Spring) symbolizes flourishing period and, over the life, period of youth. Similarly, *l'automne* (the fall) represents, in contrast, old age or decline.

1. *les années tenders* (tender years)

It is rather *l'âge tender* (tender age) that is used to designate *l'enfance* (the childhood) and *l'adolescence* (adolescence). We can find, on this occasion, other expressions, corresponding to different stages of life:

1. *l'âge ingrate* (the ungrateful age);
2. *le bel âge* (the beautiful age);
3. *la fleur de l'âge* (the prime of life);
4. *l'âge mur* (the aged);
5. *l'âge de raison* (the age of reason);
6. *entre deux âges* = *n'être ni jeune ni vieux* (middle-aged = being neither young nor old);
7. *le troisième âge* (the third age);
8. *ne pas faire son âge* = *ne pas paraître* (do not do his age = not to appear);
9. *être à la fleur de l'âge*, etc. (be at the prime of life, etc.).

We can continue the work at home to develop the list of expressions on *âge* (age), using them in sentences illustrating / expressing its various meanings: age, era, time, period.

3. The Emphasis

Based on the two exclamatory forms in the song: *Qu'est-ce que c'est bien d'avoir trente ans !* (How good is to be thirty!) and *Comme c'est drôle !* (How it is fun!), if considered useful for the class, it could work on *emphasis*. We will ask the students to find them in the text and give other examples:

1. *que c'est bien !* (it's so good!)
2. *ce que c'est bien !* (what it is good!)
3. or simply *c'est bien !* (it is good!) (reinforced or not by different adverbs: *c'est* (it is) very / strongly / so / really *bien !* (good!)) and distinguished from a simple assertion by *the intonation*.

It should be noted that the most common methods of expressing emphasis are:

1. *qu'est-ce que c'est ... !* (what it is ...!)
2. *c'est ...!* (it's ...!)
3. *ce que ...!* (what ...!)
4. *que ...!* (how ...!)
5. *comme ...!* (how ...!)

Examples:

1. *Qu'est-ce que c'est intéressant !* (What interesting it is!)
2. *C'est super ! C'est génial !* (It's great! It's brilliant!)
3. *Ce que tu es sage !* (That you are wise!)
4. *Que je suis étourdi ! Que tu es belle !* (How dizzy I am! How beautiful are you!)
5. *Comme je te comprends ! Comme c'est drôle !* (How well I understand you! How funny it is!)

A list of phrases can also be proposed by asking students to find the exclamatory form that suits best, depending on the language register of each one:

1. *Elle est sympa.* (She is nice.)
2. *Vous êtes élégant.* (You are elegant.)
3. *On gèle ici.* (It's freezing in here.)
4. *J'en ai marre.* (pop.) (I'm fed up with. (pop.))

5. *C'est désagréable. (It's unpleasant.)*
6. *Il est chouette ce film. (It's nice this film.)*
7. *C'est gentil d'avoir pensé à moi. (It's nice to have thought of me.)*
8. *Ils ont raison. (They are right.)*
9. *C'est absurde. (It's absurd.)*

After working on the problems here presented, we will try to reformulate the ideas of the song: contrary to popular opinion, the beautiful age, according to Yves Duteil, is 30 years. For him, the youth was silent, full of anxieties and sorrows. It is now (30 years) that he is happy, blooming. The years that passed did not bring him the worries which we always talk about, but, on the contrary, balance and love.

We will provide students opportunities to express their opinion, vis-à-vis the Duteil's one, which was anxious throughout his whole adolescence (Appendix) [18]. He considers thirty years as his well and happy age, being convinced that his thirty years are also a little bit of others... When Duteil writes songs, he has the impression of giving things to others and to freeing oneself of things.

He does not feed on his own despair and believes that trying to get out is the only way. When one is about to "drowning", it should not describe what is happening around, but it must "swim" towards the bank to save himself. We think this is what Yves Duteil is trying to do in his songs.

This is the profound message of the song and it can become a valuable impetus for us all: to cross the ocean of existence – LIFE. We can suggest students to comment and

express their opinion on *le plus bel âge de la vie (the best time of life)*, compared to those of the singer.

What is important is that the song circulates in the streets "from mouth to ear" and that it lives a life of its own beyond its author, as another famous French singer, Charles Trenet, says in his song *L'âme de poètes (The soul of poets)* [20]:

*«Longtemps, longtemps, longtemps,
Après que les poètes ont disparu
Leurs chansons courent dans les rues.»*
(*"Long, long, long,
After poets have disappeared
Their songs run through the streets."*)

4. Conclusion

What interests in a song is less the origin of its words (historical, psychological, social), but *when* the words circulate and *where* someone listens to them. The cultural function of the song is simply evoked by the verb "to hum". It is, indeed, the discursive dominant of the enunciation which allows fragments of songs to circulate, even if one does not know what their significance was in all the original text.

Activities and games of the kind that we presented here seem to give encouraging results in promoting the need, desire and pleasure to communicate in the narrow space of the four walls of a classroom.

Table 1. Original song lyrics in French and English translation by paper author.

Avoir trente ans	Being thirty years
Qu'est-ce que c'est bien d'avoir trente ans ! On se moque de l'air du temps, On est encore dans la jeunesse. À cheval sur les souvenirs, On a le temps de voir venir La vieillesse.	How good is to be thirty! We laugh air of time, We are still in youth. Astraddle on memories, We have time to see coming Old age.
On parle beaucoup des tourments, Des problèmes avec les enfants, Des querelles et des jours de peine, Mais quand parfois on est content, Qu'est-ce que c'est bien d'avoir trente ans ! Quand on aime.	We talk much of torments, About problems with children, About quarrels and sorrow days, But sometimes when we're happy, How good is to be thirty! When we love.
On croit toujours que les tourments Font cortège avec les printemps Qui se posent sur nos épaules, Mais la légende a fait son temps. Moi, je suis plus heureux qu'avant. Comme c'est drôle !	We always believe that torments Are gathering with the passing of springs That are alighting on our shoulders, But the legend has had its day. Me, I am happier than before. How it is fun!
Qu'est-ce que c'est bien d'avoir trente ans ! Quand je repense à tout ce temps, Je me souviens de ma détresse, De mes premiers chagrins d'amour, Des années tenders au cœur si lourd De tristesse.	How good is to be thirty! When I think again of all this time, I remember my distress, My first love sorrows, The tender years with the heart so heavy Of sadness.
J'aurais donné toute ma vie Pour être plus vite aujourd'hui.	I'd give all my life To be faster today.

Avoir trente ans	Being thirty years
Pour échapper à mon silence, J'ai gravi les marches du temps. Qu'est-ce que c'est bien d'avoir trente ans ! Quand j'y pense!	To escape my silence, I climbed the stairs of time. How good is to be thirty! When I think of this!
On croit toujours que tout s'éteint, Que le temps défait les chemins, Que les rues sont toujours les mêmes, Mais la légende a fait long feu. Moi, mon chemin c'est un ciel bleu, Et je t'aime.	We always think that everything goes off, That time destroys ways, That the streets are always the same, But the legend has fizzled. Me, my way is a blue sky, And I love you.
Si je t'écris ces mots d'amour, C'est pour te dire que si un jour Je t'ai fait pleurer, ma tendresse, C'était les derniers soubresauts De mes peurs et de mes sanglots De jeunesse.	If I write you these words of love, This is to tell you that if one day I made you cry, my love, There were the last convulsions Of my fears and sighs Of youth.
Et puis pour dire à ton petit Dont les yeux se sont assombris, Que j'ai pleuré pour des nuages, Que j'ai passé par son chemin Avec ma tête entre mes mains, À son âge.	And then, to tell your little Hose eyes are gloomy, I cried for the clouds, I passed by his way With my head in my hands, At his age.
Je t'ai attendue bien long temps, Mais pour t'aimer plus tendrement, Je n'ai plus rien qui me retienne. Je n'ai plus mal à mon passé Le present a tout effacé De mes peines.	I waited for you a long time, But to love you more tenderly, I have no thing more that retains me. I do not have bad in my past The present has erased everything From my sorrows.
Mais j'ai toujours mon cœur d'enfant Et pour s'aimer tout simplement, Qu'est-ce que c'est bien d'avoir trente ans !	But I always have my child's heart And just to simply love, How good is to be thirty!

Appendix

Short Yves Duteil's Biography

Yves Duteil is a French singer, songwriter and performer, born July 24, 1949 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. He is also the nephew of the famous Captain Dreyfus, to whom he dedicated a song on the album *Touché* (Touched). Married June 28, 1975 at Noëlle, he has a daughter, Martine, and a grand-son, Toussaint.

Since 1989 he is mayor of the municipality of Précy-sur-Marne in Seine-et-Marne French department. There is also a member of the sponsoring committee of the French Coalition for the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence (Coordination Française pour la Décennie de la Culture de Paix et de Non-violence). He is sung by other artists, including Rose Laurens, Nana Mouskouri, Joan Baez, Rika Zaraï, Mireille Mathieu, Fabienne Thibault, Allain Leprest, Michel Fugain and Stéphanie Hertel.

His song «Prendre un enfant par la main» (“Take a child by the hand”) was cited as the best French song of the twentieth century, according to the monthly *Notre Temps* (Our Time) in 1987 and arrived in 1988 at the head of an opinion poll, organized by SACEM, RTL and Canal +, concerning the

determination of the most beautiful songs of the century in the hit-parades. In 1981, Yves Duteil created the publishing house Éditions de l'Écritoire (Editions of Inkstand), becoming his own producer. Since the beginning of his career, Yves Duteil sponsors many associations related to maltreated childhood, like Les Petits Princes (Little Princes).

In 1995 he joint Jacques Chirac in the presidential elections. The Guignols (Puppet clowns) at TV News had caricatured him, his puppet being the subject of numerous sketches. In 2001 he was made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (Chevalier of the Legion of Honour).

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