Language learning through hip-hop music

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Listeners can learn new vocabulary through hip-hop music, even though the lyrics may be difficult to understand, according to a study published in the Dec. 21 issue of the online journal *PLoS ONE*.

The author, Paula Chesley of the University of Alberta, found that the number of hip-hop artists that a participant listened to was predictive of the participant's knowledge of words and phrases used in hip-hop songs that are not considered to be mainstream, like "road dog" (friend) and "guap" (lots of money).

Additionally, participants were more likely to know a vocabulary item if the hip-hop artists they listen to use the word in their song lyrics. These effects were seen even when other factors, such as demographics, general pop culture knowledge, and overall musical preferences, were taken into account.

Most work on vocabulary learning from media exposure has focused on infants or non-native speakers. Therefore, investigating how adolescents learn vocabulary from voluntary exposure to music reveals novel aspects of language learning, and takes into account the intention and motivation of the learner. Constructing a vocabulary can be a vital part of defining the speaker's identity, so further research into the mechanism of vocabulary development may continue to shed light on this important process.

More information: Chesley P (2011) You Know What It Is: Learning Words through Listening to Hip-Hop. PLoS ONE 6(12): e28248.

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