

Linguistics researcher uses pop music to teach vocabulary

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Friederike Tegge, who has taught German and English, was inspired to conduct research on pop music when she observed that many of her students showed a surprising memory for song lyrics in a foreign language and could repeat whole verses even years later.

"I realized that the mnemonic effect of songs could come in handy when

[learning](#) vocabulary."

Friederike conducted a series of classroom studies in Europe with learners of English as a [foreign language](#).

College and [university students](#) participated in a lesson based on a [song](#), poem or prose text.

"They then undertook a number of memory tests, the results of which revealed that learners remember a text better when it is presented as a song.

Friederike knows that vocabulary is one of the biggest hurdles when learning a language. "You need to learn thousands of words and pop songs can help you remember verbatim text.

"This is useful not just for learning single words, but for remembering words in context and how they are used in phrases."

But when working with song lyrics learners tend to focus on the structure of the text, and the meaning might not always be as important, says Friederike.

"Such a focus on the text structure rather than the meaning helps to remember a text word for word, but you probably want to make sure the [text](#) is correctly understood and elaborate on the meaning as well."

As part of her research, Friederike also explored the beliefs of teachers in 41 countries—including New Zealand, the United States, Japan and her home country Germany—and their teaching practices involving songs.

The responses to a questionnaire indicated that songs are not viewed as a

reward for tired [students](#) at the end of a day, but instead that they are used for clearly defined educational purposes.

"Many teachers reported that it is very motivating for students to learn and understand pop songs.

Friederike says she is pleased to be able to provide some sound backup to a topic that sometimes raises a few eyebrows.

"When songs are used in the classroom, there are often thoughts about whether students are learning or just having fun—in some countries more than in others. My research findings indicate that songs can facilitate vocabulary acquisition, and it supports teachers in their use of songs.

Provided by Victoria University

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