

The Design and Delivery of an English Course Focusing on the History of Country Music

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Over the past decade and more the author has attempted to harness the popularity and enjoyment of American mass culture for the purposes of teaching English as a Foreign Language in Japan. It has been an essentially cultural and humanistic approach to language teaching in contradistinction to an applied linguistic approach based on a set of research-derived needs for a putative global society. The goal is the development of an individual transcultural self (Howell, 2024) with second language acquisition as an incidental but highly practical secondary benefit. The present article builds on previous course developments focused on African-American popular music (Howell, 2019) and the music of the Beatles (Howell, 2022). What all three projects have in common is the centrality placed on historical narrative. The songs used in the courses are not selected on the basis of a hoped-for familiarity amongst young people. On the contrary, and particularly in the case of Country music, the assumption is that the set of songs are not already known, but familiarization with them as a cultural narrative will be meaningful and beneficial. The article will firstly discuss reasons why Country music was selected for educational material, and then outline the pedagogical process used in each class. The process differs from that of the two previous courses in that use was made of a learning management system (Moodle). The bulk of the article will relate details of some of the main historical subgenres and individual songs selected for the course. The subgenres, songs and artists are summarized in tabular form in Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

What is Country Music?

Country music is a genre of commercial popular music, so named because of its association with rural geographical settings, primarily in the South and West of the United States of America. It has never been fashionable or hip after the manner of, say, rock music, often being associated with lack of education and general backwardness, as neatly summed up in the comedian Bob Newhart's quip: "I don't like country music, but I don't mean to denigrate those who do. And for the people who like country music, denigrate means 'put down'". As acclaimed documentary film-maker Ken Burns (2019) has stated:

It is conventional wisdom, accepted by too many, that country music is somehow a lesser art form, a simple country cousin (literally) lacking the elegance and complexity of jazz, a suspect musical form which too often is easily relegated to the "lower forty" of your cultural studies, bottomland, not befitting the scrutiny of sophisticates. (p. ix)

Why Choose Country Music?

So, one might naturally ask, “Why choose to use Country songs in teaching English as a Foreign Language?” The reasons can be grouped into three categories: commercial, sociocultural, and personal. Firstly, Country music was and is an important part of the recording industry. It was in 1923 that Ralph Peer first recorded the Atlanta fiddler John Carson for Okeh Records before moving to the Victor Talking Machine Company and recording other ‘hillbilly’ artists such as Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter family. Peer is considered a pioneer of the business of Country music, in particular song publishing. As Diane Pecknold (2007) writes:

Peer’s prolific hillbilly artists wrote new tunes, modified traditional songs in the public domain to create new compositions that could be copyrighted, or appropriated original songs from less canny amateurs (p. 26)

More contemporary artists such as Garth Brooks and Shania Twain, although they may not be appreciated by Country purists, rank among the top ten solo recording artists of all time. According to the Financial Times, the best-selling album of the last eight years, amongst any genre, is country artist Morgan Wallen’s *One Thing at a Time* (Nicolaou, 2024). Nashville, Tennessee, considered the capital of country music, is home to more music industry professionals per capita than either New York or Los Angeles (Harper & Cotton, 2015).

Secondly, Country music reflects a disruptive historical moment in American society as millions of poor rural residents migrated to urban centers in search of a more comfortable life, yet still yearned after a sense of rural values and culture. Its themes deal with a sociocultural ‘reality’ of modern life that is not necessarily conveyed by other media of popular culture, such as the ‘dream factory’ of Hollywood. Song themes are highlighted by four stereotypical album titles selected by Capitol Records for the artist Merle Haggard: *Hurtin’*; *Drinkin’*; *Prison*; *Cheatin’*. *Hurtin’* and *Cheatin’* may reflect the outcome of unrequited or failed love with its attendant sense of loneliness and separation. *Drinkin’* and *Prison* reflect Country’s gender issues and struggles with the displacement of a masculinity that is problematic in modern society (McCusker & Pecknold, 2004; Fox, 2009). The precarity of family and home is also a constant theme. Such issues are, in fact, probably universally relevant, and thus a potential source of conversation topics for English speaking classes.

Thirdly, the history of ‘hillbilly’ Country and Western culture has strong connections with my own cultural background of Northern Irish Presbyterianism. Fischer (1989) identifies four ‘folkways’ in the British settlement of North America, one of which is the predominantly Scots-Irish migration from the borderlands of Britain to the colonial frontier country in the Appalachians and beyond. As Ritchie and Orr (2014) point out, the Scots-Irish brought with them a rich trove of traditional songs and ballads that made a huge contribution to the ‘old time’ music that in turn was adapted into what became Country music. Thus, an English course based on Country songs meshes culturally with my own person as the teacher in a way that other types of music such as, for example, the music of the Beatles does not.

METHOD

Aim

In this research, my aim is to document the construction of a Country music EFL course, listing the genres, artists, and the eleven songs chosen for the syllabus, explaining their historical relevance, the pedagogical opportunities they present for language learning, also citing student reactions collected via written comments on Moodle. The article provides a case study for the construction of a music-based EFL course with a strong cultural element anchored in Country music.

Course

The course was offered to twenty-four first-year students majoring in English Education at Hiroshima University under the official title of *English Communication Practice*. The class lasted approximately seventy minutes and met twice a week for seven weeks. The pedagogical activities required of participants in the course comprised both online activities using the learning management system Moodle and classroom activities in fourteen seventy-minute sessions. However, in order that thorough explanation of the Moodle activities be provided face-to-face and enough time be available for misunderstandings to be rectified, online activities were only required from the second week onwards. Also, there was no online preparation for the three review classroom sessions in which no new song was introduced.

Pedagogical Process

Moodle

The Moodle activities were intended to constitute preparation and were required to be completed before the classroom sessions that made up the core of the course. They required listening and writing on the part of the participants. Using Moodle to provide URL links, participants were asked to listen on YouTube to the Country song that would provide the focus for each classroom lesson. It was important that the video, in addition to the audio track, also showed the lyrics visually in titles or subtitles. For this reason, and also to provide variety, links were also added to cover versions of the songs where subtitled videos of the original artists could not be found on YouTube. For example, Bob Wills' *Faded Love* was supplemented by Patsy Cline's cover and Lefty Frizzell's *If You've Got the Money* was accompanied by Willie Nelson's version. In addition to listening to the song, students were also required to write answers to four questions uploaded to Moodle by the teacher. The first of the four questions was always the same: *What do you feel on listening to this song?* This was to provide an incentive for actually listening to the songs and thinking about the lyrics. The other three questions generally asked for personal reactions to topics raised in the songs such as family, home, travel, love, and health. The quality of this writing in terms of effort and accuracy was taken into account for the purpose of grading.

Classroom

There were fourteen classroom lessons in the course, eleven of them focusing on eleven classic Country music songs that together told the history of Country music up to the 1970s, and three lessons reviewing material from previous classes. Pedagogical process, as is common in the Communicative Approach, featured a substantial amount of student pair work. Therefore, at the start of the course, students were randomly

assigned to seats in pairs. At the time of the first two review classes, pairs were reassigned to add variety and mitigate any idiosyncratic personal awkwardness or friction. Classroom process in each lesson was focused on four main activity blocks:

- Listening
- Language zoom-in point
- Reading text
- Conversation

At the start of each lesson, students listened to a CD recording of the song-of-the-day. While so doing, to focus attention on the lyrics, a listen-and-circle activity was conducted. Students were given an A-4 sheet with nine pairs of vocabulary words or expressions and were asked to circle the option they heard in the lyrics, after which the teacher elicited and confirmed the correct answers. Students were then given the full lyrics of the song and read aloud chorally in repetition after the teacher. After that, the teacher explained a lexical, grammatical or pragmatic point in the lyrics that he felt students might not be familiar with. This was done using an A-4 sheet with a zoom-in on the linguistic information, usually accompanied by a rudimentary exercise. This ‘zoom-in point’, emerging from the lyrics of the song, was idiosyncratic and sometimes relatively obscure in nature, such as medical acronyms and abbreviations in the lesson for *T. B. Blues*. A significant amount of the roughly 70-minute class time was given over to reading an authentic English text either about the country artist who sang the song or the subgenre to which the song belonged. However, rather than passively reading it, students were required to actively construct the text themselves in two stages: firstly, filling in blanks in the text by choosing from the missing words highlighted in a box, and secondly, by writing out the remaining text in a pair dictation exercise. To conclude the reading block, students listened to the teacher read the text aloud and completed a listening task in which they had to sequence the textual order of ten randomly listed vocabulary items from the reading text. The final block of each lesson was given over to conversation practice in two stages. In the first stage, students practiced three of the Q&A questions to which they had already written answers in the Moodle preparation. They practiced these questions in rotating pairs and were encouraged to broaden the conversation to topics of their own choosing. In the second stage, two students were randomly selected to sit in a ‘hot seat’ at the front of the class to answer the three questions plus two or three additional questions thought up by other class members. If time permitted, the lesson then typically finished by class members asking two or three *ad hoc* questions to the teacher. Students were usually keen to bring to the lesson to a timely end and did not hesitate to volunteer questions in order to do so. A visual summary of lesson process is schematized in Appendix 2.

COURSE CONTENT: EIGHT SUBGENRES AND ELEVEN SONGS

The course was designed to introduce students to the history and songs of Country music. In this section I introduce subgenres, artists and songs that formed the core of the course, noting the points of historical interest, the themes of the selected songs, along with the linguistic aspects that make them relevant to students. This is combined with student responses to some of the songs to illustrate ways in which they were received.

Country Blues: (Jimmie Rodgers) *T. B. Blues*

Jimmie Rodgers (1897–1933) was born near Meridian, Mississippi and according to his biographer, Nolan Porterfield (2008, p. 344), “his intrinsic musical talent was deeply rooted in the rural southern environment out of which he came”, so that, although he actually sang a wide variety of songs including vaudeville novelty songs and popular sentimental songs, he became to be considered the father of commercial country music. Known as the singing brakeman, he was certainly exposed to the blues music of African-American railroad workers, and “the resigned-but-alive view of life that can result when you know, from early early adulthood, that you have a serious, probably terminal case of tuberculosis.” (Mazor, 2009, p. 46). Thus, the song selected for the course was indeed *T. B. Blues*, whose lyrics include the line, “I’ve got that old T. B. / I can’t eat a bite” and negative lexical items such as “sorrow”, “graveyard”, “can’t sleep at night”, providing a stimulus for general conversations about personal health and diet, and a zoom-in language focus on a few random, but not rare medical-related abbreviations: “WHO”, “AIDS”, “ICU”, “BP”, “STD”, “IV”, “MS”, “ADHD”. An extract from Porterfield’s biographical entry in the New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture was selected for the reading activities.

Bluegrass: (The Stanley Brothers) *Man of Constant Sorrow*

Bluegrass music is a type of country music whose name is derived from Bill Monroe’s band: Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys, which was formed in 1939 in the state of Kentucky, famed for its blue grass flora. Played using acoustic instruments, it is highly influenced by the traditional fiddle music brought to the Appalachian region by settlers from England, Scotland and Ireland. Another key instrument in bluegrass is the banjo, reflecting influence from African-American traditions and the blues. Vocals reflect the singing style of Bill Monroe, high-pitched and up-tempo, with harmony being particularly important. Arguably the closest subgenre of country music to roots or folk music, it nevertheless exercises demonstrable appeal internationally, even in culturally distant Japan where there are over twenty bluegrass festivals held yearly and a specialist monthly magazine, *Moon Shiner*, is published. The song selected for inclusion in the course was *Man of Constant Sorrow*, a song made popular by one of Monroe’s early imitators, the Stanley Brothers. Ralph Stanley had been raised with the *a cappella* hymn-singing tradition of the Primitive Baptist Church and learned clawhammer banjo from his mother (Duncan, 2019, p. 143). Ralph and his brother Carter had learned in church a version of blind fiddler Dick Burnett’s song, *Man of Constant Sorrow*, first recording it in 1950. After their performance of the song at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival, the song began to be played by artists such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, and it enjoyed another burst of popularity after its prominent use in the 2000 film, “O Brother, where art thou?” With plaintive lyrics such as “I bid farewell to old Kentucky / the place where I was born and raised” and “I have no friends to help me now”, it lends itself to personalized conversations about home, upbringing and friendships, and also to a zoom-in language quiz about binomial expressions such as “by and large”, “far and near”, “loud and clear”, “hustle and bustle”, “neat and tidy”, and “sick and tired”. For the reading text, recourse was had to excerpts from the Wikipedia entry on Bluegrass music that explain the link between the genre and traditional music from the British Isles.

Western Swing: (Bob Wills) *Faded Love*

Western Swing was a type of dance music that blended traditional country with elements of jazz,

particularly swing, incorporating instrumentation from drums, piano and steel guitar. It was popular in the clubs and dancehalls of Oklahoma, Texas and California in the 1930s and 40s. Its most famous practitioners were Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The song selected for the course was *Faded Love*, written by Wills together with his father and brother. It was covered by Patsy Cline during the last recording session before her death in a plane crash in 1963. With its poignant refrain of “I remember our faded love”, it can lead into conversations about best and worst memories. Written reactions on Moodle to the song included the following comments, showing interesting reflection on the part of students about the contrasts between the two versions:

Personally, I like the one which a man sings better, because the contrast between masculinity and lonely atmosphere is very attractive.

The song by Bob Wills sounded cheerful and fun in time. The second song, by Patsy Cline, on the other hand, had a more relaxed and sad melody, and the meaning of the lyrics was expressed more frankly.

With its pivotal line of “It was in the springtime that we said goodbye”, the song also allows a language focus on the special word order constructions of it-clefts, wh-clefts, and demonstrative wh-clefts. For the reading text, excerpts were chosen from Dayton Duncan’s illustrated history of Country music that provided background information about Wills and Western Swing (Duncan, 2019).

Honky-tonk: (Lefty Frizzell) *If You’ve Got the Money*, (Hank Williams) *Hey, Good Lookin’*

Honky-tonk was a type of Country music that was particularly popular from the end of World War II until the advent of rock’n’roll music in the mid-1950s. It was often played on juke boxes in smaller bars and taverns, and has sometimes been called “hard country” or “beer-drinking music” (Malone, 2008, p. 80). With its songs about drinkin’ and cheatin’, it is reflective of changing mores in the transformation of America from a rural to an urban society, and of “the tension between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, the sinner and the saved, the rascal and the responsible one” (Burns, 2019, p. xii). Two songs were selected for the course. The first was *If You’ve Got the Money*, co-written and recorded by Lefty Frizzell. It can be focused on for teacher talk about conditionals, including their pragmatic functions as polite directives. The song also naturally leads into speculations about money and free time for conversational Q&A. For the reading text, an excerpt from Bill Malone’s encyclopedia entry referenced above was used. Positive student reactions to the song included the following comments:

Pop tune and bright singing voice express optimistic feelings and I like it so much.

I thought the lyrics of this song was so interesting because it was about money and time. However you can’t buy time by money. That’s why I found it interesting.

The second honky-tonk song selected was *Hey, Good Lookin’*. The amusing title leads into Q&A about good-looking celebrities, cooking habits, and favorite dishes, and its reference to “soda pop” invites teacher talk about the various expressions for carbonated drinks in the different varieties of English. The song was

written in only twenty minutes by probably the most famous and venerated of all country artists – Hank Williams, sometimes called the “Hillbilly Shakespeare”. Williams’ tragic life story, as told clearly and expressively in Duncan (2019), provided interesting reading material. Born into poverty in rural Alabama, Williams suffered from debilitating back problems throughout his life. Like Lefty Frizzell, he also suffered from alcoholism, and died at the age of twenty-nine. Student engagement with the lyrics of the song is shown in comments such as:

I like the lyrics of this song, such as “We could find us a brand new recipe” or “If you wanna have fun, come along with me”, because they seem to take me to an interesting world.

In the lyrics of the song, we can find many phrases about living together. Good example, “How’s about cooking something up with me?”

Rockabilly: (Johnny Cash) *Folsom Prison Blues*

Hank Williams had been influenced as a child by the black musician, Rufus Payne, and similarly Jimmie Rodgers as a teenager learned songs from the black railway workers of the South. But African-American R&B had its most explicit influence on country music in so-called “rockabilly”. The prototypical rockabilly song is Elvis Presley’s upbeat adaptation of the Bluegrass song *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, recorded in 1954 by producer Sam Phillips as the B Side of Elvis’s first hit, *That’s All Right*. Another of Phillips’ proteges was Johnny Cash, one of the biggest stars of Country music. The rockabilly song selected for the course was *Folsom Prison Blues*, written by Cash in 1953 and recorded in Memphis in 1955. With lyrics such as “When I hear the train a-coming / I hang my head and cry” and the notorious line “I shot a man in Reno / Just to watch him die”, it enables teacher talk about dialectal a-prefixing and conversational discussion about topics such as violence and personal regrets in one’s life. Students wrote interesting comments such as the following two:

I guess our childhood memories remain inside of us forever, and when we have time to face ourselves, they vividly appear on our mind.

I strongly thought I didn’t want to make a mistake that I would regret for the rest of my life like this man.

For reading material, the passage was a teacher-edited excerpt from Michael Bertrand’s entry in the New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, which highlights rockabilly’s occasional “arrogant masculinity” and its “merging of black and white along cultural lines” (Bertrand, 2008, p. 121).

Nashville Sound: (Jim Reeves) *Adios Amigo*; (Patsy Cline) *Crazy*, (Tammy Wynette) *Stand By Your Man*

Nashville, Tennessee had been a center of country music since the 1920s, as it hosted the popular radio show, the *Grand Ole Opry*. In 1955 producer Owen Bradley opened a studio on 16th Avenue, Nashville and shortly after RCA Victor set up a studio on 17th Avenue run by Chet Atkins. The area became known as Music Row and became the center of a new type of country music that became known as the Nashville

Sound, or sometimes as Countryopolitan. The sound pioneered by Bradley and Atkins was indeed targeted not just at rural audiences, but also the rapidly growing metropolitan audiences. It was a sound that downplayed traditional rusticity, “toning down the nasal twang and southern accents of country voices with smoother backup vocals and adding swelling string sections to soften (or replace) steel guitars and raspy fiddles” (Ching, 2008, p. 303). The popularity of Jim Reeves is exemplary of the countryopolitan strategy: the posthumous release of *Distant Drums* topping the UK charts amidst the heyday of British pop. Reeves had begun his career as a ‘hard country’ singer, but Chet Atkins’ production style emphasized a crooning clarity of diction in songs such as *Adios Amigo*, something picked up in reactions of students, such as:

When I listened to this song, I was very impressed by the slow melody and the bass voice of the male singer. Also, the song was very slow, so it was easy to hear and understand the lyrics.

The Latino flavoring of the lyrics invites some pedagogical focus on the use of Spanish words in English – *siesta, ranch, plaza, vanilla*, etc. – while the lyrical focus on friendship and departures to pastures new leads naturally to conversations about friends and ideal places to live. The Wikipedia entry on Owen Bradley and the Nashville sound was adapted as reading material.

Bradley’s signature artist was Patsy Cline, who, like Reeves, was to have her life cut short in a plane crash. Her most famous song is undoubtedly her version of the lost-love song *Crazy*, written by Willie Nelson. The lyrics referencing worries and tears lend themselves to discussion of worries and things that make us cry. Cline’s plaintive sob of “Oh, crazy” opens a path to a quiz-game about interjections, a possibly neglected area of instruction on speaking in English, while a concise narrative of her life in the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture provides accessible reading material (McDearman, 2008). Student reaction to the song again included reference to the ease of listening:

When I listened to this song, I was impressed by the woman’s singing style and beautiful sound of the song. The voice was high and very easy to listen to, and the melody was slow, so the lyric was easy to understand.

Another producer in the Nashville Sound genre was Billy Sherrill who co-wrote the song, *Stand By Your Man* with artist Tammy Wynette. A No. 1 hit, it became one of the most famous (or possibly infamous) songs in the history of Country music. The song, a plea for women to tolerate the problematic behavior of their male partners (“because after all he’s just a man”) was a perfect match to Wynette’s own hard-scrabble life. “She experienced heartache and divorce, was abducted and beaten, had a death threat, and went through a public bankruptcy” (Uffleman, 2008, p. 390). Perhaps fortunately, Wynette did not follow the advice of her own song and was married five times, and it might be noted that some reactions of female students showed that they were not impressed with the message of the song:

I disagree with this lyric. I don’t want to be a doormat.

I don’t want to stand by a man if he does things that I don’t understand. For example, I’ll never forgive his cheating. I don’t have unconditional love.

Despite such negative takes on the conservative ‘message’, it should be noted that the song itself was among the more popular ones when students were asked informally about their favorites. The story of Wynette’s tough early life and her breakthrough hit as recounted by Duncan (2019) was used for reading material, and Q&A conversations addressed topics such the qualities of an ideal husband, and pride (“If you love him / Be proud of him”) and its opposite shame. The lyric, “you’ll forgive him / *even though* he’s hard to understand”, prompted a grammar quiz activity focusing on concession clauses.

Bakersfield Sound: (Merle Haggard) *Mama Tried*

The concessions made by the Nashville Sound to smooth-sounding pop were not welcomed by all Country artists, some of whom wished to stick to the more rustic image of Honky-Tonk and Western Swing. One such artist was Merle Haggard. Born northwest of Bakersfield, California, his parents had migrated from rural Oklahoma during the great depression. Unlike the manufactured image of Johnny Cash, Haggard had actually been an inmate of San Quentin prison and was in fact inspired to become a Country singer by Cash’s famous concert at the penitentiary. The song chosen for selection in the course (*Mama Tried*) reflected Haggard’s own experience as a delinquent youth who was nevertheless never given up on by his mother. It enables Q&A conversations about mothers and personal regrets. Idiom-rich lines such as “Dear old Daddy, rest his soul / left my mom a heavy load” can lead to language activity introducing other English idioms. The background to the song is recounted in some detail in Duncan (2019) and can be adapted for reading material. One student explicitly picked up on the lyrics relating the mother’s unwavering loyalty and devotion:

“Workin’ hours without rest

Wanted me to have the best”

This lyric impressed me. I feel that mother is great.

Country Rock: (Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris) *Love Hurts*

Towards the end of the 1960s a fusion of rock and Country music began to be called *country rock*, a label certainly applicable, for example, to the early incarnations of the Eagles who went on to become among the top five selling artists in history. A pioneer of country rock was Gram Parsons, who symbolized the merger of country tradition with rock permissiveness by having a Nudie suit (the rhinestone-embroidered outfits tailored by Nudie Cohn) designed with depictions of marijuana leaves. He himself labeled his blend of country and rock “cosmic American music”. Before dying from the adverse effects of multiple drug use, he toured with protégé Emmylou Harris. One of their most beautiful duets is *Love Hurts*, released posthumously in 1974, written by country songwriter Boudleaux Bryant and originally a hit for the Everly Brothers. With lyrics such as “love hurts” and “love is just a lie”, conversations can be had about how to comfort lovelorn friends and the question of lying in our social lives. “I know a thing or two / I’ve learned from you” can lead into teacher-talk about vague language and its pragmatic uses in social interaction. Reading material was drawn from Duncan’s (2019) account of Harris’s brief collaboration with Parsons, cut short by Parsons’ death at the age of 26. One student drew the following philosophical lesson after listening to this sad and powerful song:

Love is difficult and dangerous. We are sometime hurt by loving someone, but we can learn from it. However, the most important thing is taking care of yourself.

TEACHER REFLECTION

Overall, the course ran successfully. A large proportion of classroom time could be given over to pair work Q&A and pair-dictation construction of written texts, although some teacher talk could be included on idiosyncratic points of linguistic interest. As the teacher, I was satisfied with the high levels of classroom interaction between the students and written reactions to the songs on Moodle, which appeared to demonstrate at least some level of engagement on the content level.

As was the case with other courses which I have designed (Howell, 2023), simple polling found that students particularly favored talking about positively skewed topics, the most popular being questions about memories and best friends, as well as questions focusing on pride in themselves and their hometowns. In addition to positive participant engagement, I was also pleased to be able to offer a course that was possibly unique in its content and that also reflected my own cultural background.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have described the construction and implementation of a 14-lesson course focusing on the history of Country music. Eleven songs were selected by the author for the course, recorded by some of the greatest stars of Country, from Jimmie Rodgers to Hank Williams, from Johnny Cash to Merle Haggard, covering the development of eight subgenres ranging from Bluegrass to the Nashville Sound to Country rock, paralleling the sociocultural changes in 20th century America as it changed from a rural to a largely urban society.

The ‘realist’ themes of Country music songs provided an entry point for Japanese students to converse with each other in English on topics such as health, home, family, friends, memories, love and issues of gender. Classroom conversations were made easier because the songs had already been listened to on Moodle and written preparation had already been completed for the questions to be talked about. The design and delivery of the course provides an example of the way a course focused on music can be used to provide both cultural enrichment and language learning.

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APPENDIX 1

Table of Subgenres, Songs and Artists Used in the Course

Subgenre	Song	Release Date	Artist
Country Blues	<i>T. B. Blues</i>	1931	Jimmie Rodgers
Bluegrass	<i>Man of Constant Sorrow</i>	1950	Stanley Brothers
Western Swing	<i>Faded Love</i>	1950	Bob Wills
Honky Tonk	<i>If you've got the money</i> <i>Hey, good-lookin'</i>	1950 1951	Lefty Frizell Hank Williams
Rockabilly	<i>Folsom Prison Blues</i>	1955	Johnny Cash
Nashville Sound	<i>Adios Amigo</i> <i>Crazy</i> <i>Stand By Your Man</i>	1962 1961 1968	Jim Reeves Patsy Cline Tammy Wynette
Bakersfield Sound	<i>Mama Tried</i>	1968	Merle Haggard
Country Rock	<i>Love Hurts</i>	1974	Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Lesson Activities (activities in brackets are optional)

Moodle Preparation	Listening to the song Writing answers to four questions
In-class activities	<p>Listening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Listening to the song</i> - <i>Circling vocabulary</i> - <i>Reading aloud lyrics</i> <p>Language zoom-in point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Read the explanation and listen to the teacher</i> - <i>(Complete a written exercise)</i> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Fill-in-the-blanks</i> - <i>Pair dictation</i> - <i>Vocabulary sequencing</i> <p>Conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Rotating Q&A</i> - <i>Hot-seat Q&A</i> - <i>(Teacher Q&A)</i>

ABSTRACT

The Design and Delivery of an English Course Focusing on the History of Country Music

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Popular songs have often been advocated as a source of interesting materials for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Often, however, songs appear to be selected on an *ad hoc* basis, without any common thread providing a unifying focus for the course of lessons. The present article presents a practice report of a course of lessons that integrates songs into the cultural history of the United States, by focusing on a specific genre of popular music, namely Country music. Firstly, reasons, both cultural and personal, are provided for the selection of Country music as a genre. Thereafter, an outline is given of the activities used in the individual lessons, both homework preparation on the Moodle learning management system and classroom procedures with a heavy emphasis on pair work and conversation. The bulk of the article outlines the 11 songs included in the course, describing how they can be categorized into eight subgenres, ranging from postwar Bluegrass Music through the pop-influenced Nashville Sound to 1970s Country rock. It is explained how Country lyrics facilitate personal conversation topics such as homeland, family, friendship, romance, gender issues, worries, etc., and how they also allow for teacher talk on points of linguistic detail. Comments from students are also cited that indicate a substantial level of engagement with the songs and their meaning.

要 旨

カントリーミュージックの歴史に着目した英語コースのデザインと実践

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人気のある歌は、外国語環境における英語教授 (Teaching English as a Foreign Language, TEFL) の教材として、興味深いものと推奨されてきた。しかし、多くの場合、授業で使用される曲は、授業全体でまとまった共通のテーマに沿って選択されるのではなく、ただ場当たりに選択されているようである。本稿では、歌とアメリカ文化史を統合した授業実践の報告を行う。歌のジャンルについては、人気のあるジャンルの1つであるカントリーミュージックに焦点を当てている。本稿ではまず、カントリーミュージックというジャンルを選択した理由について、文化的な観点及び著者の個人的考えから説明を行う。その後、各授業で行なったアクティビティについて、学習管理システム Moodle を活用した学生の予習と、ペアワークや会話に大きく重点を置いた授業内の指導の両方をもとに概説する。加えて、本稿は、授業で取り上げた11曲の概要を述べ、同時にそれらが戦後のブルーグラスやポップスの影響を受けたナッシュビル・サウンド、1970年代のカントリーロック等の8つのサブジャンルにどのように分類されるのかも詳しく説明する。また、カントリーミュージックの歌詞が、「故郷」「家族」「友情」「恋愛」「ジェンダーに関わる問題」「悩み」などの個人的な会話トピックを引き出すのにどのように役立つのか、加えて教師による言語的に重要な説明をどのように促すのかについても解説する。本稿は、学生による意見も引用しており、これらの意見からは、曲やその意味に対する学生の高いエンゲージメントが示されている。