

# Character and Expression of a Musical Piece in Foreign Language Teaching to Children

Karolina Jarosz

Academy of Music, Kraków, Poland

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## Abstract

The author explores the interdisciplinary use of music in teaching English as a foreign language to children in the context of function, genre, character and expression, trying to decipher the role and influence of music on various contexts of language learning, such as memory and concentration span, and takes under consideration a wide variety of musical aspects. From earliest childhood, active listening is perceived as an ability that helps a child to develop sensitivity to facilitate the acquisition of many skills, not only related to music. This assumption should lead to the list of the most idiomatic determinants – the elements of a specific *dialogue* between a musical piece and a *listener-learner*: the child. The question whether multi-stimulating senses of a child and the development of sensitivity to Art leads to easier assimilation of a foreign language as well as leads to the general assimilation of information remains flowing and open. The idea of applying classical music to foreign language teaching draws on recent research into the interrelation of expression, verbal emotions and mood in the fields of musical perception and foreign language learning. The features of a musical piece are discussed in the context of intuitive and active listening to music against the techniques and methods used in foreign language teaching in early childhood such as *total immersion*, as well as in the context of linking emotional reactions to music to early vocabulary acquisition. The author hopes to provoke further research into musical properties which may influence the methodology in the above mentioned area.

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**Keywords:** Learning foreign language; teaching foreign language; English as a second language; music theory; music education; music and language; non-verbal communication.

The interdisciplinary ways of teaching English are still at the centre of attention of scientists of various disciplines, therefore, it should not be unusual that this subject is undertaken by a music theoretician.

Further reflections will focus on a general study of the constructive usage of not only music with words but also pure instrumental music in foreign language teaching in two contexts: *the character* and *the expression* of a musical work. The text will not, of course, even partially exhaust the topic but at least may extend the attempts to answer a question: what else can be researched in the area of effective foreign language teaching?

The selection of chosen methodology includes such aspects as: humanities, development of reading, development of language creativity, foreign language teaching (*glottodidactics*), the studies on *expression* and *nature* of music (named here as *character*), and research on the relationship of music and emotion.

*The methodology of humanities* assumes a cognitive linguistic approach dealing with assimilation, collection, and usage of information, proving that language is closely related to mental processes involved in perceiving the world. Its main task is to explain not only language skills, but also social competencies enabled by language usage. *Research in the development of reading* show that the greatest potential for intellectual development of the child's brain exists in the first four years of its life since neuron units are considered to be 50% formed at the age of four years, 70% at the age of 6 - 7 years, and about 80% in eight year-old children. *Studies on the development of language*

*creativity* focus on linking analogical and metaphorical methods (*per analogy* and *per metaphor*) with one of the basic mechanisms of the process of creation. The essence of these two types of thinking is based on associating similarities between objects and phenomena in the familiar, simple and specific and in what is unknown and abstract.

A modern approach to *teaching foreign languages* is based on concepts of integrated education and developmental psychology (Pamuła, 2009). As it is known, many methods and techniques of teaching English have been developed so far and among the most popular are: *conventional methods* (such as the grammar – translation method, the direct method, the audiolingual method or the cognitive method); *unconventional methods*, such as the silent way, suggestopedia, community language learning and total physical response; *communicative approach* such as the Widdowson's communicative language and teaching, content based instruction, task - based instruction and participatory approach; and *complementary approaches* such as: learning strategy training, cooperative learning and multiple intelligences (Szewczyk, 2004). The methodology of teaching foreign languages such as glottodidactics emphasises the importance of emotions in language learning. The following statements of Barbara Anisimowicz and Mirosława Stawna underline this approach:

“Teaching and learning a foreign language is more than just a cognitive process, thus, emotional factors should be also taken into account in studies on the effectiveness of various cognitive factors”. (Anisimowicz, 2000)

“Through the usage of functional or conceptual programmes, using the method of communicative language teaching, learner should grasp the meaning of a sentence at first, and then the grammatical rule”. (Stawna, 1991)

*In the studies on expression and character in music*, it often happens that the definitions of character and expression are used as synonyms. Although, in the field of music these terms are similar to each other, they cannot be used interchangeably: the difference seems to be subtle but cannot be missed as character can be understood as a set of internal and unique qualities of the music piece, that are different from the expressive external formal qualities which bring music to a single design. According to Mieczysław Tomaszewski expression is a manifestation of the character of music as the emotional load through which the composer communicates with the recipient of his work and the character becomes a static phenomenon, whereas the expression – the dynamic phenomenon (Tomaszewski, 1978).

Thanks to expression, music is perceived as a distinctive speech that thrills our hearts and can be explained as an inherent element of things or phenomena, the ability of suggestive expression of feelings in Art, and an external sign of feelings or spiritual experiences.<sup>34</sup> Johann Georg Sulzer pointed out *Ausdruck* is the soul of music and without it, music becomes merely pleasant fun. The methods of research into expression can be various, for example, based on the expressive markings, the so-called *expressive didascalias*, provided by the composer himself; based on the documents or statements of the authorities; or through the analogy of the similar places in the scores.

Mieczysław Tomaszewski points out the qualities of the character that differentiate the nature of the musical piece, introducing the concept of ‘a specific value’ that is: *differentia specifica*. The methods of research into the character of a piece of music are mainly based on the concepts of many theoreticians and composers themselves, such as: Friedrich Schlegel, Jean Paul, Robert Schumann, Wili Kahl, Martha Vidor, Erwin Bodky, Elfriede Glusman, Arnold Schoenberg, Constantin Floros, Eero Tarasti, and Michał Głowiński (Poland).

<sup>34</sup> Jarosz K., „Polska miniatura skrzypcowa czasów romantyzmu i modernizmu. Od Karola Lipińskiego do Grażyny Bacewicz. Charakter utworu muzycznego w świetle recepcji”, *doctoral research*, AM w Krakowie, Kraków 2014, p.18.

*The exploration of the affiliation of music and emotion* is still at the centre of interest of contemporary researchers: musicologists and music psychologists. John Sloboda, Patrick N. Juslin, Andreas Lehmann, and Robert H. Woody prove that expressions and emotions in music – here shown in the context of foreign language teaching – resonate in the future: the child combines and associates the designates of expressions and emotions that are verbally determined in English as a foreign language, and associates meanings with emotions that are brought by music. As a result, it is easier to remember those designates: words, sentences or phrases in a foreign language. Andreas Lehmann writes that:

“As we know from general psychology, memory is context – specific; that is, we not only learn a specific content but also remember the learning environment, psychological condition, and so forth, associated with it”. (Lehmann A.C., Sloboda J.A., Woody R.H., 2010).

As it is known, music carries the entire spectrum of emotional phenomena. Although the reception of these phenomena can be very subjective, one can extract basic emotions, as well as their ‘shades’, and assign them to different ‘characters’ in the context of either the entire musical piece or separate musical passages. The words of Joseph Kerman justify this process:

“Verbal messages included in the musical composition, have every right to be taken into account along with their contents equally with the analyzed forms of sound.” (Kerman, 1994)

Keith Oatley and Jennifer Jenkins (1996) distinguish the spectrum of emotional phenomena based on the duration of each of them: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, even the period of a lifetime. According to the scheme submitted by these two authors<sup>35</sup> expressions last seconds; verbalized emotions, minutes and hours; moods, weeks and months.

During the process of perception such a way of interpreting can be related to a musical piece:

- *Expressions* may refer to the smallest moments lasting seconds, expressed by a specific technique, melody or harmony (or all of them);
- *Verbalized emotions* may refer to parts expressed by *expressive didascalia*; and
- *Moods* may refer to the general nature of a musical piece.

Patrik N. Juslin and John Sloboda (2010) point out:

“Emotions and moods may contribute to the development of memory and remembering. To distinguish between different degrees of emotional states and their intensity, the following terms are used:

- affect
- emotion
- mood
- feeling
- arousal of emotion
- induction of emotion
- perception of emotion”.

It is proven that memorizing will become easier to a child if a word or a phrase to remember corresponds to a particular emotion, in other words, if it is put in some specific context. The teacher, helping the child to name these emotions, should be able to extract them and make a typology, such as the typology of expressive qualities. In the process of making such a typology, a couple of aspects may be taken under consideration such as: the *hippocratic typologies of characters* of Immanuel Kant or Wilhelm Wundt (based on: Gasiul, 2006) distinguishing four main characters and their associated feelings of activities such as: choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, sanguine; *theories (or typologies) of characteristics*, such as the theory of states by Hans Eysenck, introducing unstable states against the

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<sup>35</sup> Strelau J., *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki*, t.2, D. Doliński (Ed.), Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2008, p.343.

stable ones: the neurotic personality against emotional stability, or introversion against extroversion; or the *tables of expressions*, for example, the popular *Wheel of Emotion*, by Robert Plutchik

As it is known, from the earliest childhood, listening is the ability that helps a child in developing sensitivity to facilitate the acquisition of skills that are not only related to learning music. Through proper presentation of the world of sounds around, through paying attention to music, a child's sensitivity to Art is developing and the senses are being stimulated, and learning a foreign language, as well as the general assimilation of information, becomes facilitated. It is said that the child listens straight through the heart and not through the brain, does not analyze, does not interpret, does not even listen with understanding. So the child sees the music through imagination and through feelings. As noted by Leszek Polony:

“Music, like love, belongs to the realm of psychic awareness. Musical awareness interiorize physical phenomenon of the sound, constitutes the cadenza of these sounds, deciphering ethos and expression.” (Polony, 1978)

The child naturally finds and senses this Ethos, taking any content intuitively, always truly and sincerely. The child's mind goes through the path, adequate to perception and motoric reaction to the sound, that Mieczysław Tomaszewski, while discussing an entirely different matter, called ‘emotional’. According to Tomaszewski, motoric reaction is manifested by:

- “... motion: walking, running, hiding, and some other reactions resulting from:
- The wish to escape or attack: as the audio equivalent of pre-verbal expression;
  - Mimics as the equivalent of pre-verbal *onomatopoeia*; and,
  - Or gestures as the equivalent of pre-verbal games of sound ornamentation”.
- (Tomaszewski, 1978)

Taking all above into consideration it is vital to emphasise the importance of musical material selection that enables the child to grasp and name character – expressions and emotions carried by music that can be put in the context of a particular state of perception. Searching for some paths in this matter, it is of the primary importance to precisely provoke a situation like “total immersion in music” in order to observe the child's response: emotional or motoric. Following this path, a teacher should be able to determine which emotions accompany each musical part. How do children behave in response to it? What do they see in their imagination? How do they move?

The most important objective of the research is to answer the following set of questions:

- Whether children memorize their own reactions to music, and link them to specific musical situations?
- Whether, through these situations, they respond (emotionally or through movement)?
- Whether through their response they associate specific situations with words and sentences?
- Whether they memorize these words and sentences and can repeat them in analogical musical situations?
- Whether all of the above can speed up the process of learning?

At this point I would like to underline two different situations:

- The main, wordless situation, where a "pure" emotion is carried by music; and,
- The process of assigning these emotions to the group of positive, or negative terms.

The expression and nature will reflect an inner character of music and excitement that this music brings. Mieczysław Tomaszewski points out that:

"What carries the Art of Art is either a reaction of a subject to the entity, that is the reaction of a man to the world, or a reaction of a subject to a subject, or a person to a person. In the first type of reaction - a subject to an object, the world, nature, the event, there is no need for words. The sound manifestation of such a reaction includes a pure expression - scream of fear, laughter, joy, cry – or pure “onomatopoeia” and imitations of the sounds of nature such as: voices of birds and other animals, atmospheric phenomena; like an echo and a cliché documenting the dependence of the man on nature; or a pure sound-play as a

combination of sounds forming the vocal ornament, arabesque, wordless vocalise, humming, whistling wondering and amazement to the world". (Tomaszewski, 1978)

I underline this once again: by "character" I mean in this case what is inside the music and what is delivered to the outside by expression, and by "expression" I understand emotions received by the child and presented physically, through gestures or mimics. Thanks to this, memorizing, such as placing a particular word or phrase in the context will be easier.

Highlighting the two main aspects: The expression and the character in the system of organizing the musical material one can distinguish at least five contexts:

- Source context: That is, what exists in the musical score;
- Musicological context: That means the analysis and interpretation of the musical work and musicological research;
- Intuitive context: The context of one's own interpretations where one can follow the music material and adjust it to the meanings which can be later used for teaching purposes (but always according to their "nature": it is obvious that we do not use the tarantella's fiery passages to illustrate silence and calmness);
- Reception context: That means research related to the theory of reception; and,
- Perception context: that is, empirical studies related to the research in perception.

As far as source context is concerned one should take into account the composers' or editors' annotations, for instance a distinctive title visualizing familiar models from the surrounding world of nature such as *Carnival of Animals*, *Flight of the Bumblebee*, *the Bee*, etc.; emotional load that relates to the expressive *didascalia*, such as *con fuoco*, *dolce*, *con vigore*, *appassionato* etc. and is emphasized by distinctive technical measures, such as *pizzicato*, chords, accents; dynamics (*forte - piano*, *crescendo - diminuendo*); rhetorical phrases (ex. *tirata*); agogical changes (*largo*, *allegro*, *accelerando*, *agitato*, *calando*, etc.); or contrasting form (like in *Polish Capriccio* for violin solo by Grażyna Bacewicz)

As far as musicological research is concerned the teacher can refer to: genealogical research, such as the nature of genre (lullaby - lyrical, tarantella – lively); general nature of the musical piece, such as illustrative, programmatic, lyrical or choreic, or many variants which refer to, for example temperament: fiery, impulsive, joyful, sad; or agogics: fast, slow, etc.; general function, such as referential, expressive, impressive, phatic, based on Roman Jakobson's model which was distinguished for music purposes by Mieczysław Tomaszewski (2005) in relation to the main functions of a piece of music in 'the space of culture'.

As far as intuitive context is concerned one can forward one's own conclusions based on one's own selection of musical fragments, such as illustrative or affective ones, regardless of the general nature of a musical piece (see: "*Wee Sing and Pretend*" by Pamela Conn Beall and Susan Hagen Nipp, 2001, 2002). In this case, musical material is treated like a carrier of intended meanings for teaching purposes – so it is idiomatic. It is obvious that if a teacher wants to rely on *expressive didascalias* that are included in the musical score they must choose a musical piece that would transmit those expressions clearly. If the child associates emotions with words, these emotions must be readable and understandable and so the musical piece needs to be of a characteristic nature. The message must be clear so that the child can immediately associate a particular piece of music with the appropriate character. For example, the easiest way is to contrast musical sections reflecting different basic emotional states:

love – hate  
fear – anger  
happy – sad  
anticipation – surprise  
merry – miserable

In relation to all of the above, at this level it is not essential that the choice of musical pieces or parts - nor their interpretation - be correct from the musicological point of view, but it is essential that it reflects clear and understandable emotions the child can feel in immediate response to the music - and that those emotions refer to the words that will be pronounced and memorized.

It is crucial that the sound material is friendly and natural to the child’s world, although some more difficult pieces (such as 21<sup>st</sup> century pieces) with a transparent transmission can also be included. Some examples are presented below (for internet sources please see references).

**Table 1:** Symbols transmissions.

<b>Sharpness</b>	<b>Gentleness</b>
K. Penderecki, <i>Cadenza</i>	C. Debussy, <i>La fille aux cheveux de lin</i>
Danger	Expectation
K. Penderecki, <i>Metamorfosen</i>	R. Wagner. <i>Tristan und Isolde</i>

Internet sources provide countless opportunities for selecting sounds with pictures. At this level, similarly, one can freely interpret and use for didactic purposes examples of musical works, such as:

**Table 2:** Sound with pictures transmissions.

<b>Mountains</b>	<b>Wojciech Kilar, Orawa</b>
snow, winter	C. Debussy, <i>Footprints in the Snow / Des pas sur la neige - Preludes, Book 1, No. 6</i>
The moon	Claude Debussy, <i>Clair de Lune</i>

As far as reception context is concerned one can take into account what has been said and written about a piece of music in concert/recordings reviews, newspapers, monography etc. (see Romuald Starkel’s anecdote); in stories, legends and tales; in scientific articles and books, etc. For example, a wealth of the reception expressions are related to *Myths* by Karol Szymanowski or Romuald Starkel’s anecdote, quoted after the *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (Table 3 and 4).

**Table 3:** The context of reception, *Myths* by Karol Szymanowski.

920	M. Skolimowski	“poetical poems for violin-piano”, “Szymanowski himself: an esthete, in love with charming fairy-tale visions”
922	Zdzisław Jachimecki	“extraordinary palette”, “fantastic harmony”
969	Józef M. Chomiński	“captivatingly beautiful”
980	Teresa Chylińska	“They emphasize above all the composer’s musical imagination Powerful expressive charge and rich colors”
005	Bohdan Pociąg	“lush”, “born of wealth and thrust of creativity”, “shaped asymmetrically, developed widely, capricious in narrative, variable in movement, pace and rhythm. The melodic lines and shapes of sound are "Art Nouveau" flexible, sinuous, flowing, Plant-like stems, branches, buds, leaves, flowers ... That the music seduces us with sensual splendour of the early summer. We can almost see the beauty of the musical piece as if it were a painting, billowing and twinkling with different shades and nuances of colour”.

As far as empirical research and perception context is concerned a musical piece is a subject that generates a variety of contexts based on empirical research and tests of expression or the level of its illustrativeness or lyricness.

**Table 4:** Context of reception, *The Legend* by Henryk Wieniawski.

Vocabulary: love, father, husband, daughter romance, wife, family, children.	“ the genesis of the <i>Legend</i> does not lack in romantic elements: Sir Hampton, originally against the marriage of his daughter, Isabella, with Wieniawski”, as Józef Reiss recalls from the novel by Romuald Starkel <i>The Legend – a real event in the life of the artist</i> , which appeared in “The Illustrated Week” from 1880 approached Wieniawski after the concert in which Wieniawski performed <i>The Legend</i> and said: “Only a true love can explain such inspired music with which you spoke to us today. I am convinced that nobody can love my daughter deeper. Therefore, I do not wish any other happiness for her and would be honoured to call you my son-in-law”.
Musical piece: Henryk Wieniawski, <i>The Legend</i>	

The topic of the influence of music on foreign language teaching is worth further studies and research into the relations between a musical piece and long-lasting effects of memorizing, long-term memory. Following the theory of integrated education, English teachers could or maybe should extend their linguistic knowledge and experience to other areas and benefit from the knowledge and experience that musicologists possess. Armed with such strong methodological and theoretical bases, they would be constrained by nothing but their own imagination.

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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ea2WoUtbzuw>

## About the Author

**Karolina Jarosz** graduated from the Faculty of Musical Education at the Academy of Music in Kraków (AMK). Under the direction of Dr. hab. Magdalena Długosz, she defended the Master's thesis entitled *Musical computer programs for ear training* and evaluated this degree in the United States. She also completed a doctoral seminar at the Institute for Educational Research by the Ministry of National Education in Warsaw; and the Theory of Music Doctoral Studies at the Academy of Music in Kraków. In 2011 she received a scientific grant from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and obtained Doctoral degree at the Academy of Music in Kraków for thesis entitled *Polish Violin Miniature of the romanticism and modernism era. From Karol Lipinski to Grażyna Bacewicz. The nature of a musical work in the light of its reception*, written under the supervision of prof. dr hab. hc Mieczysław Tomaszewski. Her interests focus on the works of Polish composers and violin pieces of the XIXth Century with the special attention of function, genre, character and expression. As a teacher she has been leading Music in English classes for children 0-12 years old and applies her knowledge and experience to the curricula.

## Address

**Dr. Karolina Jarosz;**

Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie;  
*The Academy of Music in Kraków;*  
ul. św. Tomasza 43;  
31-027 Kraków;  
POLAND.

**e-Mail:** karolina.jarosz@gmail.com