

Sing My Story: Lyrics and Music as Storytelling for Language Learners

Angela Lee-Smith, *Yale University (CT)*

ABSTRACT

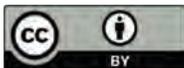
This article explores how music and lyrics serve as modes of storytelling in the language classroom, integrating a multimodal approach and the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. In the ‘Sing My Story’ project, language students creatively write their own lyrics, which are subsequently performed by either student musicians or target language-speaking musicians within the school community. This initiative encourages students at the Intermediate or Advanced proficiency levels to collaboratively produce a music album, creating narrative lyrics for existing songs. Through this project, students are provided with opportunities for meaningful language application, fostering creative and transformative language learning experiences.

Keywords: *classroom instruction*

Introduction

Storytelling has been an integral part of human culture since time immemorial. It enables us to express emotions, share experiences, and connect with each other. In contemporary society, music remains a powerful tool for storytelling. It is capable of evoking strong emotions and conveying complex narratives. This article explores the utilization of song lyrics as a means of storytelling in language learning classrooms (Carlson, 2010; Ludke, Ferreira, & Overy 2014; Piri, 2018, Rukholm, 2015), using a multimodality approach and learning goals based on the

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

NECTFL *Review*, Number 92, March 2024, pp. 181-196. © 2024 by Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). Learners can experience transformative learning through “Sing My Story,” a project in which language learners write their own lyrics for existing songs, and then student musicians sing those lyrics. This project focuses on using music and song lyrics as a mode of storytelling and provides opportunities for personal reflection, cultural exploration, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and language development.

Multimodality—the multiliteracies approach (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Jewitt, Bezemer, & O’Halloran, 2016)—acknowledges the diverse ways in which individuals engage with and make meaning from different modes. It encourages the integration of various modes of communication, including visual, linguistic, aural, gestural, textual, and spatial modes, to enhance language learning. In the context of lyrics as storytelling, this approach invites students to engage with music, lyric writing, and language holistically, promoting multimodal literacy. For example, lyrics, as a textual mode, enable students to transform their experiences and aspirations into stories, while music, as the aural mode, adds emotional depth. The combination of these two modes—lyrics and music—creates a powerful storytelling medium that turns language learning into a vibrant, enriching, and holistic experience.

The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages serve as a blueprint, guiding our language learners to communicate effectively and interact with cultural understanding in multilingual settings. Within these standards, the 5C goal areas—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities—emphasize the importance of applying language learning in practical contexts. They help language learners use the skills and understanding set by the Standards, preparing them for real-world applications and experiences (Cho, 2015; The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). We can effectively address these goals and foster a comprehensive language learning experience by utilizing lyrics as storytelling.

Through creating lyrics as a means of storytelling, students engage with language in a practical and culturally resonant manner, effectively closing the divide between classroom language instruction and its real-world application. This approach within the language classroom empowers students to communicate effectively, comprehend, and establish connections with various cultures and communities, aligning seamlessly with the overarching objectives of language learning standards.

The Project ‘Sing My Story’

Through the ‘Sing My Story’ project, students at the Intermediate or Advanced proficiency levels produce a music album collaboratively by recreating existing songs with their own lyrics, or writing lyrics and music from scratch. The project highlights music and song lyrics as modes of storytelling.

Our students create lyrics for their favorite music or songs in various genres. They then collaborate with other students; the project can be seen as a multi-way collaboration between a lyricist, a composer, and a singer. Instructors facilitate a

unique collaboration by pairing language students with singers from various backgrounds within the institution. These singers may be graduate students from the music school or undergraduates participating in different a cappella groups. Throughout their collaboration, singers and student lyric writers exclusively communicate in the target language: Korean. While the language students enhance their narrative skills, the singers bring their musical expertise. In their discussions, they address several aspects of song creation in Korean, such as tailoring lyrics to melodies, ensuring rhymes, and deliberating over singing styles and expressions. This collaborative effort amplifies the learning experience, using the target language for creative and purposeful applications. Continuing the collaboration, the music students sing the songs with the lyrics created by language students. Finally, the singers and lyricists produce a digital album and a concert, or a digital podcast.

Objectives

Through this project-based learning unit, students are able to demonstrate ability in the following areas:

- communicating and expressing their thoughts and emotions through rewritten song lyrics in the target language while maintaining the rhyme and rhythm of the original song;
- analyzing and identifying cultural references, customs, and traditions depicted in song lyrics from different cultures;
- making connections between the target language and other subjects by identifying subject-specific vocabulary or concepts in song lyrics;
- comparing and contrasting song lyrics from different cultures, highlighting the cultural perspectives, language use, and musical elements;
- collaborating with peers to create original song lyrics in the target language, demonstrating effective communication and engagement with the target language community.

Procedures

Teachers can use the following step-by-step procedure to implement the use of lyrics as a mode of storytelling in the language learning classroom:

1. *Song Selection:* Choose existing songs with compelling narratives, relevant themes, and appropriate linguistic complexity. Consider songs from different genres, themes, languages (the target language or other languages with translations into the target language, such as Korean-pop, Chinese pop, English pop, etc.) and cultures to expose students to a variety of musical styles and perspectives. Also, allow the students in the class to choose songs they like or from their playlist.
2. *Analysis and Discussion:* Engage students in active listening and critical analysis of the chosen songs. Encourage discussions about the meaning of the lyrics in the target language (e.g., *What do you believe the lyrics of the song convey or express? Are there specific lines or words in the song that seem especially meaningful or symbolic to you?*), the song's cultural context (e.g., *Can you identify any cultural references in the song that someone outside*

Korea might not be aware of? Based on the lyrics, do you see any similarities or differences between your own culture and Korean culture? Are there any shared experiences or contrasting values highlighted in the song?), and its emotional impact (e.g., How did the song make you feel the first time you heard it? Did your feelings change after understanding the lyrics? Which part of the song resonated most with you, and why do you think it had that effect?). Students can share their interpretations, personal connections, questions related to the songs, and reviews as critics (e.g., *On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall impact of the song, and why? What aspect of the song stood out most to you, and would that make you recommend it to others? Why or why not?*).

3. *Storytelling Workshop*: Guide students through a series of writing workshops to develop their own storytelling lyrics. During the writing workshop, provide prompts, examples, and guidance on narrative structure, character development, and thematic coherence. Encourage creativity and exploration of different storytelling techniques.

The writing workshop phase aims to offer students a guided, hands-on experience in lyric writing in the classroom. Students will hone their lyric-writing skills and deepen their understanding of the language through discussions and the lyric-writing process.

Instructors may spread this over three class meetings:

- In the first workshop meeting, as an introduction, instructors underscore the value of lyric writing in language comprehension and the emotions and stories songs can evoke. They then provide a few sample song lyrics in the target language. Students collaboratively analyze these lyrics, focusing on expressions, content, style, and how storytelling is woven into the songs. Instructors present several prompts for students to scaffold; these may involve writing about personal experiences, addressing societal issues, or translating literature into lyrics. The prompts might also touch upon colloquialisms, shortened/omitted forms, or English insertions in lyrics, which are common in K-pop lyrics today.
- The second workshop meeting is dedicated to hands-on writing and collaboration. Students prepare outlines of their lyric writing outside of class, either individually or in groups, and bring a rough draft or summary into the workshop. During this phase, instructors facilitate by answering students' questions and offering language-related advice (e.g., grammar, vocabulary) to assist students in writing and refining their lyrics. Students are encouraged to share their drafts with their peers. This process is both productive and essential, as peers and instructors can provide constructive feedback, suggesting improvements in language use, rhythm, or overall storytelling.

- Finally, students refine their lyrics both linguistically and artistically to craft them as song lyrics. The workshop concludes with students sharing their lyrics and reflections on the lyric-writing experience.
4. *Collaboration*: Facilitate collaboration between student writers and volunteer singers. Language students are primarily responsible for writing the lyrics. These lyrics are then sung by collaborating singers not part of the language class. Typically, the language students select the songs they wish to work with and write lyrics accordingly. This dynamic brings together the language students' exploration of lyric writing as storytelling with the musical talents of the singers. It is a collaborative process where the language students focus on the content—lyrics—and the singers bring those words to life through their performance.

Encourage students to work together to refine their lyrics, compose melodies, or create harmonies. Emphasize the importance of effective communication and respectful teamwork. Given that the recruited singers are either fluent Korean speakers or advanced-level language students, they are well-equipped to serve as language mentors during collaboration. They can offer helpful corrections and provide valuable language advice to the students.

To foster successful collaboration between the language student (lyric writers) and singers, it is essential to set clear guidelines. All interactions should preferably be conducted in Korean, ensuring language immersion and clarity. While lyric writers can offer input on singing style, feedback must always be constructive. Mutual respect is crucial; the lyricists bring their carefully written stories, and singers contribute their unique musical interpretations. Both parties are encouraged to have the flexibility to make minor lyric adjustments to better fit the melody or rhythm.

5. *Performance, Production, and Reflection*: Organize a final performance or recording session (video production of each song and make a collection using platforms like Padlet or VoiceThread) through which students can showcase their storytelling lyrics in a final song produced. At the start of the session, each lyric student introduces their song and the context offering a summary of their lyrics. This personal touch allows the audience to understand the inspiration and background of the song before they hear it. Following the introduction, the produced music is showcased in a video format. As the song plays, lyrics are displayed on the screen as subtitle captions, ensuring comprehension and immersion by the audience. This visual element not only aids in understanding but also enhances the overall experience of the showcase. This allows students to experience the joy of performing and sharing their creations with others. Follow up with reflection activities, in which students evaluate their language learning journey, the challenges they faced, and the skills they developed.

It is worth noting that while students are generally encouraged to share and present their work, some may hesitate to showcase their lyrics in front of the class. For those considering implementing this project, it is advisable to offer alternative arrangements for such students. Possible alternatives could include having students submit a written reflection on their songwriting journey, offering a one-on-one presentation opportunity with the instructor, or allowing them to share their work within smaller peer groups for a more intimate setting.

Table 1 is a summary of the ‘Sing My Song’ learning tasks, organized in the 5 C’s goal areas. The learning tasks, as shown in Table 1, foster meaningful and creative language applications, cultural understanding, critical thinking, and collaboration skills, while also providing opportunities for self-expression and creativity within the context of the ‘Sing My Song’ project. This project lets students choose songs to write lyrics to enhance accessibility and promote diversity in their language learning experiences. However, note that teachers who implement this project may simplify it by choosing a single song from their target language as the springboard for new lyrics, making it an alternative and flexible option.

Table 1
Sing My Song Learning Tasks

The 5C Goal Areas	Task	Description
Communication	Create a songwriting collaboration	Divide the students into pairs or small groups, ensuring that each group includes at least one language student who writes the lyrics and one music student, often a singer fluent in the target language from outside the language class (unless there is a singer student within the language class). These pairs (a lyric writer and a singer) collaborate and communicate entirely in the target language as they work together to create and perform newly crafted lyrics.
Cultures	Explore cultural influences in music	Ask students to research and present on a genre of music from a target language-speaking community. Students can discuss the cultural aspects, social significance, and themes commonly found in that genre. The presentation can include audio or video examples of songs from that genre to help classmates understand its (socio)cultural context. (For example: Regarding various themes of the songs, <i>talk about how K-POP looks and sounds, and what kind of stories K-POP songs tell. Share what you think makes K-POP cool or interesting.</i>) (Note: for other world language classes, it can be modified

SING MY STORY: LYRICS AND MUSIC AS STORYTELLING FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The 5C Goal Areas	Task	Description
Cultures	Explore cultural influences in music	using different examples, such as C-pop, Latin pop, etc.). Furthermore, provide students with intercultural prompts. (For instance, <i>Choose a K-pop song and analyze its lyrics for cultural elements, such as references to cultural products, practices, and perspectives. Look for words or phrases related to '가족 관계' [family relationships], '사회적 이슈' [social issues like military service], '장소 이름' [place names], unique '어휘나 표현' [vocabulary or expressions], and any other cultural aspects you can identify within the lyrics. Describe what you learn about Korean culture from the song, considering both its content and the perspective.</i>)
Comparisons	Analyze the original song and the student's creation	Assign students a couple of sample song lyrics created by their peers, along with the original songs, for comparison. In the target language, students examine and discuss the changes made to the lyrics, analyze the themes and messages conveyed. Students also talk about how the adaptation relates to their own experiences or viewpoints. Finally, students can present their findings and share their insights with the class.
Connections	Making connections using the target language to understand and create lyrics about various themes, expanding language skills and cultural understanding	Let students choose a song they are interested in or they like and explore song lyrics, gaining an understanding of the messages they convey and researching the songs and singers. They will also appreciate existing lyrics and create their own, fostering language skills and nurturing creative thinking while gaining diverse perspectives. Students write a short reflection paper or create a multimedia presentation discussing the connection they feel to the chosen song, explaining the reasons behind those connections, and sharing any personal stories or anecdotes related to the song's themes.
Communities	Organize digital podcast or in-person performance concert	Collaborate with the school's music department or local musicians to organize a virtual concert or podcast featuring the songs created by the students. Students collaboratively invite the language and music students, as well as the singers, to perform the songs live, or record them for the podcast. Promote the event within the school community and invite other students, faculty, and parents to attend or listen. Encourage students to interact and engage with the performances by providing feedback and discussing their favorite songs.

Assessments

Assessments play a crucial role in evaluating student progress and the effectiveness of lyrics as a storytelling approach in language learning. Additionally, student reflection provides valuable insights into their learning experience and allows for self-assessment. Assessments can be conducted by observing group activities through presentations (such as student-written lyrics), class discussions, or reflection reports.

Table 2 provides an overview of how each assessment aligns with the corresponding project task, ensuring that the project objectives are met and offering a rationale for each assessment.

Table 2
Project Sing My Song Assessments

5C Goal Area	Project Task	Assessment	Alignment Rationale
Communication	Create a songwriting collaboration, emphasizing collaboration in the target language.	Can collaborate with peers to create song lyrics, effectively sharing ideas and negotiating meaning in the target language.	Directly relates to the task of collaborative songwriting and communication skills in the target language.
Cultures	Explore cultural influences in music, including research and presentation on a music genre.	Can explore and integrate cultural practices and perspectives of the target language into song lyrics. Can create song lyrics that embody cultural products of the target language.	Focuses on understanding and integrating cultural elements into song lyrics, aligning with the cultural exploration aspect of the task.
Comparisons	Analyze original songs and student creations, focusing on linguistic and thematic elements.	Can interpret and analyze thematic and linguistic elements of existing songs. Can compare linguistic elements and cultural themes in song lyrics.	Emphasizes analysis and comparison of songs, both linguistically and thematically, as required in the task.

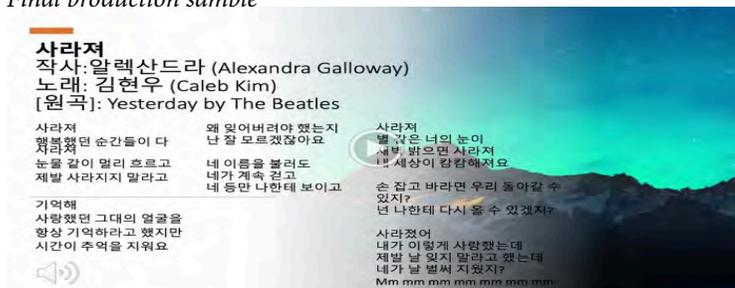
5C Goal Area	Project Task	Assessment	Alignment Rationale
Connections	Make connections using the target language to understand and create lyrics, expanding language skills.	Can research and incorporate diverse perspectives and information from the target language culture. Can reflect on the use of the target language in a creative context.	Encourages understanding and creation of lyrics through diverse perspectives and reflection on language use, as per the task.
Communities	Organize digital podcasts or in-person presentations, collaborating with the school community.	Can engage the school and wider community through performances or presentations of the created songs.	Aligns with the task, focusing on community engagement.

Table 3 (next page) showcases sample lyrics created by a student. The participating students in the project were from an Advanced Korean course, the 5th semester Korean language course in a higher education setting. (Students’ proficiency in Korean in this course varies within the range of Intermediate-Mid to High.) The ‘Sing My Song’ project can be adapted for Intermediate-level language courses with thoughtful modifications. Language teachers should consider simplifying the language complexity of song lyrics and offering more structured guidance during the project’s initial stages. Such adjustments, along with aligning project activities with the course’s scope and objectives, will allow language teachers to tap into the motivational and engagement benefits of the ‘Sing My Song’ project while ensuring its appropriateness for Intermediate-level language learners.

Figure 1 displays one of the lyric cover pages from the ‘Sing My Story’ project, with the accompanying link leading to a corresponding song performed by a student singer.

Figure 1

Final production sample



(Link to the audio: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11ZnqUfwJKxUUsmc5ck5AdWLNqvhXWUG/view>)

Table 3

Sample lyrics recreated by a student

제목: 사라져 작사: Alexandra Galloway 원곡: “Yesterday” by The Beatles)	Title: Fade away Lyrics: Alexandra Galloway Original Song: “Yesterday” by The Beatles)
사라져 행복했던 순간들이 다 사라져 눈물 같이 멀리 흐르고 제발 사라지지 말라고	Fade away All the moments of happiness, they fade away Flowing far away like tears I beg, don't disappear
기억해 사랑했던 그대의 얼굴을 항상 기억하라고 했지만 시간이 추억을 지워요	Remember Your face that I loved I always told you to remember But time erases the memories
왜 잊어버려야 했는지 난 잘 모르겠어	Why I had to forget I really don't know
네 이름을 불러도 네가 계속 걷고 네 등만 나한테 보이고	Even if I call your name You keep walking away Only your back is visible to me
사라져 별 같은 너의 눈이 새벽 밝으면 사라져 내 세상이 캄캄해져요	Fade away Your eyes, like stars Disappear at the break of dawn My world is turning dark
손 잡고 바라보면 우리 돌아갈 수 있지? 넌 나한테 다시 올 수 있겠지?	If we hold hands, can we go back? Can you come back to me?
사라졌어 내가 이렇게 사랑했는데 제발 날 잊지 말라고 했는데 네가 날 벌써 지웠지? 음음음음 음 음 음	It's gone I loved you like this I told you not to forget me But you've already erased me, haven't you? Mm mm mm mm mm mm mm

To gain a better understanding of the creative process behind the student's lyrical adaptation, here is their explanation regarding the background of their lyrics:

The Beatles' 'Yesterday' has always been one of my favorite songs, and I thought its simple yet haunting melody would suit the story I wanted to tell through my lyrics. I wanted to tell a love story about parted lovers, but as the Beatles do in the original 'Yesterday,' I also wanted to express a bittersweet longing for what is gone, for things and people we've loved but can't meet again.

The student undertakes a transformative language learning experience by writing these lyrics and applying the language meaningfully while utilizing their creativity to write their lyrics. As showcased in the student's recreation of lyrics, 'Yesterday' by The Beatles aligns with the project's primary goals. It demonstrates how language learning can extend beyond traditional frameworks, blending linguistic ability with cultural appreciation and emotional exploration. The student's work intertwines personal narratives with universally resonant themes and is a noteworthy example of meaningful and impactful language learning.

Reflection

Instructors can gain valuable insights into students' progress, strengths, and areas for improvement by incorporating various assessments and reflection questions. In addition, student reflection encourages metacognition and fosters a sense of ownership of their language learning.

In this project, students are encouraged to use the target language (Korean) for in-class discussions. However, consider allowing students to use English for reflective writing responses, especially those at the Intermediate level. This accommodation prevents their language proficiency from becoming a barrier to deep reflection and caters to students' varying language proficiency levels.

Here are sample questions for student reflection and discussion:

- 왜 이 노래를 선택했나요? [Why did you choose this song?]
- 가사를 통해 무엇을 표현하고 싶었나요? [What did you want to express through the lyrics?]
- 가사 스토리텔링 프로젝트가 어떻게 여러분의 언어 학습에 도움을 주었나요? [How has the lyrics-as-storytelling project enhanced your language learning experience?]
- 가사를 쓰면서 어떤 어려움이 있었나요? 그것들을 어떻게 해결했나요? [What challenges did you face while creating your storytelling lyrics? How did you overcome them?]
- 여러분의 가사를 불러준 가수와의 협업이 어떻게 여러분의 언어 발달에 도움이 되었나요? [How did the collaboration with singers (musicians) contribute to your language development?]
- 원래의 노래 가사와 여러분의 가사를 비교할 때, 언어 사용, 주제, 또는 문화적 측면에서 어떤 비슷한 점과 다른 점을 발견했나요? [When comparing the original lyrics and your lyrics, what similarities and differences did you find in terms of language use, themes, or cultural aspects?]
- 이 프로젝트가 교실 밖에서 여러분의 한국어 사용, 문화 감상, 평생 학습 등에 어떻게 영향을 주었나요? [How has this project influenced your language use, cultural appreciation, community engagement, and lifelong learning for personal enjoyment and enrichment beyond the classroom?]

Table 4 (next page) provides excerpts of reflections highlighting the transformative experiences of lyrics and storytelling through the 'Sing My Song' project from a learning perspective.

Table 4

Excerpts from learning reflections

<p>[Excerpt 1] The ‘Sing My Song’ project was an incredibly fun and enriching experience that allowed me to work closely with singers and composers within my school. Collaborating with them not only resulted in fantastic musical collaborations but also led to the formation of new friendships and ongoing collaborations beyond the project. We continued to work together on concerts, song-making, and performance through other cultural shows in the community.</p>
<p>[Excerpt2] This project was unlike any other language learning experience I had in other language courses. It was highly engaging, relatable, tangible, and even rewarding. I didn’t realize how much I was learning until I reflected on the outcomes. The project exposed me to new vocabulary, grammar structures, and language features through the process of analyzing and rewriting lyrics. It provided an opportunity to apply my language skills in real-life situations, such as discussing and writing about the meaning and emotions conveyed in the lyrics.</p>
<p>[Excerpt 4] The lyrics-as-storytelling approach offered a transformative learning experience, pushing me to think critically, express myself creatively, and develop my language proficiency. It was a non-traditional and unconventional approach that allowed me to fully immerse myself in the target language and culture. Through collaborating with talented singers and musicians, I not only refined my communication skills but also gained valuable insights into pronunciation, intonation, and musical interpretation.</p>
<p>[Excerpt 5] The project provided a platform for me to explore my artistic side and strengthen my language skills, and made me appreciate my language learning even more. It was an engaging and memorable experience.</p>
<p>[Excerpt 6] This project taught me to use Korean with flexibility and creativity. (...) using these skills I can navigate complex situations much more effectively and use Korean in new and unexpected ways with confidence.</p>
<p>[Excerpt 7] The original lyrics and my lyrics tell similar stories of lost love, but the execution is different. Korean, compared to English, allowed more flexibility in word order and let me emphasize this sense [of meaning]. Additionally, Korean grammar allowed me to capture this with more nuance than I could in English.</p>
<p>[Excerpt 8] [My singer] was so kind and helpful. Gifted in music and excellent at Korean, he helped me adapt my lyrics to the music in a more natural way. He also helped smooth out which grammar I was using to make sure everything worked with the melody. It was also so rewarding and confidence-building to hear the final product.</p>
<p>[Excerpt 9] At first, I was too attached to writing in English. I would start by writing my thoughts down in English and then translate them to Korean, but whenever I translated my ideas from English to Korean, it would sound awkward, and the syllable count wouldn’t align with the melody. I realized then that I needed to write from start to finish in Korean. To see what would sound natural in Korean I listened to Kim Kwang Seok [K-pop singer] and other Korean artists, and they helped my lyrics sound more natural.</p>

[Excerpt 10] The project encouraged me to use Korean in a new, exciting way and [made] me more thoughtful of my use of Korean itself. I had to consider the rhythm and sounds of the words I chose, what grammar I should use and when, and how different grammatical choices could change the feeling of what I was writing. It also helped boost my confidence in my Korean skills: Writing a song at first was intimidating, but after doing so, other tasks (like speaking to native speakers, writing essays, etc.) felt less daunting.

The sample student reflections from the 'Sing My Song' project show how the project relates to the 5 C's Goal Areas in language learning. Firstly, Communication: the development of communication skills is a prominent theme, as seen in Excerpts 1, 4, 8, and 10. These reflections reveal how students engaged in collaborative songwriting and performance, which significantly improved their ability to convey ideas creatively and interact effectively in Korean. This aspect of the project underscores the practical application of language skills in a collaborative and creative context.

Secondly, Cultures: an appreciation and understanding of cultural nuances were evident, particularly in Excerpts 4 and 7. Here, students delved into the exploration of cultural expressions through music, gaining valuable insights into the emotional and stylistic aspects unique to Korean culture. This exploration highlights the project's role in deepening students' cultural awareness and sensitivity.

In addition, Comparisons between English and Korean were a key part of the learning experience, as illustrated in Excerpts 7 and 9. Students noted differences in grammar, word order, and expression, which enhanced their understanding of the linguistic structures and cultural contexts of both languages. This comparative approach helped students appreciate the nuances and complexities inherent in language learning.

Furthermore, Connections: Excerpts 3 and 10 indicate that students made meaningful connections between their language learning and real-world applications. They applied their language skills in practical situations like songwriting and cultural interpretation, effectively linking classroom learning with authentic, real-life language use. This aspect of the project demonstrates the relevance and applicability of language skills in diverse contexts.

Lastly, Communities: Excerpts 1 and 6 highlight students' engagement with the broader community. By extending their learning beyond the classroom and using the target language in various community settings, students demonstrated the practical application of their language skills in a community context. This engagement not only reinforced their meaningful language use but also fostered ongoing collaborations, showcasing the project's impact in bridging language learning with community involvement.

The reflections indicate a beneficial effect on language learning and cultural appreciation, yet there is room for improvement. Extending activities to include broader community engagement, such as soliciting reflections from community singers who participated, would also enrich the learning experience. While the reflections are favorable, incorporating a balanced view acknowledging accomplish-

ments and ongoing challenges could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences. Such a detailed analysis could uncover whether the experiences are genuinely positive or if there are understated ongoing issues. For instance, asking for students' recommendations for project enhancements could be beneficial.

Teaching Reflection

The 'Sing My Song' project, with its focus on storytelling by recreating lyrics, has shown potential as an effective approach for language learning and promoting transformative learning experiences. Through incorporating songs and lyrics as tools for communication, students are exposed to authentic language use and cultural contexts, leading to enhanced language learning. The multimodal nature of the activities, incorporating music and visuals caters to diverse learning styles and allows students to express themselves through various mediums, fostering a deeper engagement with the material.

One of the significant benefits of this project is the promotion of cultural awareness and appreciation (as students work on intercultural tasks shared in Table 1). By exploring songs and lyrics from different cultures, students gain a deeper understanding of how language, music, and culture intersect. This exposure fosters an appreciation for cultural diversity and provides a platform for students to explore and celebrate different cultures. The collaborative nature of the project also promotes teamwork and communication, encouraging students to work together with musicians and singers. Through collaboration, students engage in social interaction, develop intercultural understanding, and share ideas, leading to a richer learning experience.

Critical thinking and analysis are essential components of the 'Sing My Song' project. Students are encouraged to analyze and critique songs, lyrics, and performances, promoting critical thinking skills. Through discussions on artistic choices, cultural influences, and societal issues, students are challenged to question, reflect, and develop their own perspectives. This process empowers students to think critically about the material and contributes to their personal growth and transformation.

The project cultivates students' creative expression. Rewriting lyrics, composing music, and creating their own performances provide students with the opportunity to unleash their creativity and express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in the target language. This creative outlet enhances their language skills and empowers them to communicate authentically.

The 'Sing My Song' project effectively taps into students' interests, enhancing the learning process by making it more engaging and motivating. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), learners should be motivated by what they are learning (what, why, and how), and in this regard, the project aligns with their perspective. By involving students in the design of their learning (actively engaging them throughout the project tasks) and connecting with music and culture they enjoy, the project encourages higher levels of engagement and motivation. Students are

more likely to invest themselves in the activities, knowing that they have a meaningful role in shaping their learning experiences.

Overall, the integration of multiliteracies and the 5 C's Goal Areas in the context of lyrics and storytelling provides a dynamic and inclusive approach to language learning. Through this project, students develop language skills, cultural awareness, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and authentic communication. The project also offers transformative learning experiences by encouraging personal reflection and expression, cultural exploration and understanding, critical thinking and analysis, creativity and agency, collaboration and community engagement, language, and communication skills.

Closing Thoughts

The 'Sing My Song' project, centered on storytelling through recreating lyrics, demonstrates significant potential in enhancing language learning and fostering transformative educational experiences. Going beyond conventional language instruction, it involves students in the creative process of making and discussing song lyrics, thereby not only aiding in language learning but also enriching the overall educational journey.

In this project, students transition from passive learners to active creators. As they engage in creating and discussing song lyrics, they delve into the practical use of language, intertwining theoretical knowledge with real-world application. Writing their own lyrics, students embark on a reflective journey, exploring the meanings, emotions, and cultural contexts behind their words. This process fosters a deeper connection with the language, emphasizing self-expression, storytelling, and the appreciation of diverse perspectives. Through this holistic and culturally responsive approach, the 'Sing My Song' project transforms language learning. It offers more diverse, inclusive, and transformative learning opportunities, pushing the boundaries of conventional language learning classrooms.

In wrapping up the report on the 'Sing My Song' project, these key takeaways may be useful for fellow language teachers to consider adapting in their language teaching:

- **Cultural Responsiveness:** Emphasizing the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds and interests into the curriculum, fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.
- **Cultural Exploration:** Encouraging educators to enable students to explore and discuss music from diverse cultural backgrounds, thus promoting cultural awareness, empathy, and a broader worldview.
- **Intercultural Competence:** Highlighting the opportunity to develop intercultural competence, with activities aimed at enhancing students' ability to appreciate and navigate diverse cultural perspectives.
- **Student Engagement:** Underlining the significance of student engagement in learning and suggesting the incorporation of students' interests, like favorite songs, to motivate active participation.
- **Global Language Use and Communication:** Focusing on designing language learning activities that emphasize global language use and cross-cultural

communication, encouraging students to communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

- Holistic and Transformative Language Learning: Demonstrating that language learning, rooted in the 5C goal areas (Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities), goes beyond vocabulary and grammar to foster transformative learning through cultural competence, intercultural connections, and community engagement.

References

- Carlson, J. R. (2010). Songs that teach: Using song-poems to teach critically. *The English Journal*, 99(4), 65–71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27807169>
- Cho, Y. (Ed.). (2015). College Korean curriculum inspired by national standards for Korean. (Special Issue) *The Korean Language in America*, 19(2). Penn State Press. 149-460.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2015). An introduction to the pedagogy of multiliteracies. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *A Pedagogy of multiliteracies*, 1–36. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539724_1
- Jewitt, C., Bezemer, J., & O'Halloran, K. (2016). *Introducing multimodality*. Routledge.
- Ludke, K.M., Ferreira, F. & Overy, K. (2014). Singing can facilitate foreign language learning. *Memory & Cognition*, 42, 41–52. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13421-013-0342-5>
- Piri, S. (2018). The role of music in second language learning, *Studies in Literature and Language*, 17(1), 75-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/10449>
- Rukholm, V. N. (2015). Singing to speak: An examination of adult L2 learners and vocabulary learning through song. *Italica*, 92(1), 171–192. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43895229>
- The National Standards Collaborative Board. (2015). *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Acknowledgment

I sincerely thank the reviewers, the editor, and my colleagues for their insightful and constructive feedback on this article. I am also grateful to Alexandra Galloway and Caleb Kim, who generously shared their lyric and song recording, inspiring a broader language learning community.

Angela Lee-Smith (Ph.D., Sangmyung University, South Korea) is a Senior Lecturer II of Korean in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University. Her pedagogical practice and research interests include the cultivation of multiliteracies, interculturality, curriculum design, assessments, material development, and project-based learning.
