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# I-RoLE 2023

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION 2023

**EMBRACING CHANGE:  
EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE  
OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC,  
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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## POP MUSIC PODCAST: A BOP OR A FLOP?

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### ABSTRACT:

Podcasts have been a constant tool used for ESL to help in improving language proficiency. However, there is a debate on podcast topics that is suitable and attractive for ESL learners. The impact of pop culture, specifically in the pop music genre, has engaged a consistent stream of fans willing to learn a foreign language to better understand song lyrics. Fans partake in fandom activities such as analysing lyrics to understand the context and expression of the song. There is an ongoing debate on whether engaging in pop culture activities could result in improving language proficiency. This study researches the suitability of pop culture topics as a podcast topic for ESL learners. Besides that, the study proposes the topic of analysing stylistic features in English song lyrics in podcasts to improve language proficiency. The findings revealed that implementing pop culture topics for ESL podcast learning tools receive positive feedback from listeners and increase learners' engagement in language learning.

**Keywords:** podcast, ESL, pop culture, language learning

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Podcast is a supporting tool that aids teachers in teaching their materials within the classroom. The usage of podcasts is mainly to improve learners' listening skills through identifying new vocabulary, memorizing phonetics of spoken words, and increasing their linguistic proficiency to become a better listener (Indahsari, 2020). Kohler et al. (2010) stated that the native speakers' original pronunciation paired with the latest topics proved as an advantage in using podcasts as a language learning tool. Students are encouraged to learn via podcast due to the various content options available (Indahsari, 2020). However, a challenge in using podcasts as a teaching aid is screening the podcast contents (Farshi & Mohammadi, 2013). This also raises the issue on which type of content is most suitable and is able to attract learners into using podcasts as a language learning tool.

Pop culture is a prominent subject on the internet, formed and carried by a large number of fans from different subcultures and fandoms. The pop music genre specifically has formed its own fandom consisting of international fans and dominated by primarily English-based content. The existence of virtual fandom information has pushed non-native speakers to learn the language in order to consume the available contents and interact with fans of the same interests (Krállová, 2019). The active communication done via social media allows fans to start discourse on various topics concerning the fandom. This includes the analysis of song lyrics based on available context.

A fan is a person who has a strong, favourable emotional attachment to a celebrity, typically demonstrated by admiration for their sense of fashion or artistic ability. They take part in fan activities and connect with other fans through the internet. The engagement and

inhabitation of fans on the internet are presented as fandom. Fandom is a social phenomenon that is frequently linked to electronic media, mass culture, and public performances in contemporary capitalist nations (Duffett, 2013). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “fandom” means “the world of enthusiasts for some amusement or for some artist” (2019). Fandoms can vary in terms of their composition, size, and cultural influence, but their main goal is typically to convey how much people love and appreciate the subject (Krállová, 2019). According to Hills (2013), fandoms and its principles are actually oddly near to academia: fans naturally engage in the processes of re-imagination in their theoretical approaches and fannish works. While it is not suitable to place the fandom environment to the same standard as academia, the existence of fandom could encourage language learning. As mentioned previously, due to the amount of English-based content available online, it could promote language learning to fans in order to consume the information. This is because fans are required to own ample knowledge in the target language to be able to either communicate with the fandom or consume the subject.

While podcasts can be used as a language learning tool, the question on the suitability of podcast topics for ESL learners arises. There has been a discourse on how educational material should stick to educational topics, however, many argued that entertainment topics should also be considered when introducing educational materials to learners. The somewhat dull sectors of health promotion, education, and development are made more enticing by the addition of entertainment (Singhal & Rogers, 2002). Due to the variety in contents, podcasts are in line with the current global “*entertainmentization*” trend and help increase students’ interests when learning. Based on research by Nikolou and Darra (2018), students stated that the podcast's material is informative and entertaining. Hence, including pop culture topics in podcasts could encourage learners in language learning as learners find it more engaging. In this paper, our objective is to implement pop culture themes as a podcast topic as part of a language learning tool to help in improving language proficiency.

### **1.1. Project Objective**

1. To assess the effectiveness of pop music podcast topics for language learning.
  - This objective is met through feedback from podcast listeners via comments and an online survey answered by the general public.
2. To investigate the competency of analysing stylistic aspects of language in song lyrics for improving language proficiency.
  - This objective is met through an online survey answered by the general public.

### **1.2. Entrepreneurial Opportunities**

This project does have potential in garnering profits which is by promoting the podcast through streaming services. With the modernization of technology, listeners can stream podcasts online. Streaming services such as Spotify or YouTube provide incentives for creators depending on the number of streams received from the content. Creators could join the YouTube Partner Program and provide monetization features for eligible creators (Google, 2023). Besides that, Spotify has a podcast platform named Anchor which also provides monetization through its Ads by Anchor feature (Anchor, 2020). Multiple modes of monetization are applicable for podcasts such as crowdfunding or merchandising sale. However, the most prevalent approach is on-air advertising (Sullivan, 2018). Advertising and sponsorships could help in creating entrepreneurial opportunities for podcasters due to the influence of their media. Alternatively, the product could be sold directly from the creator without the intervention of any third-party. The product can be uploaded on cloud storage with a personalized link for purchasing. The link would only be

provided to buyers once transactions have been completed. In this way, the profit would be received directly to the creator.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Generally, this research adopted three phases. Firstly, a literature review on podcasts as a ESL learning tool and the use of songs in language learning was analysed. This is to explore the common ground of podcasts and use of songs in language learning.

Secondly, a survey was conducted to identify the effectiveness of podcasts in language learning. Lastly, a podcast show was developed to study the competency in analysing stylistic aspects of language in song lyrics for improving language proficiency.



Figure 1: Gantt Chart of Project

The initial planning of the project began on 10 October 2022 with the author producing the idea of publishing podcasts. Through research it is found that radio, television, and social media outlets all use podcasts these days to convey intriguing content with their listeners (Scutter et al., 2010). The main idea was to include pop music as a topic of discussion for the podcast. The author researched for platforms as well as specific topics that could be utilised. After thorough research, the author decided to use Spotify as the main platform for the podcast to reach a wider range of audience. The project ‘A Girl’s Guide to Pop Proficiency Podcast: The Language Edition’ started development once the author had received feedback from their supervisor and a group of audience members.

For the first two episodes, the author decided to focus on two different stylistic aspects in language. The first episode will be discussing the use of grandiose words in song lyrics, while the second episode will be discussing the idiomatic expressions in song lyrics. The author has chosen the following topics as it is one of the most used stylistic devices in song lyrics and in language learning.

Based on the layout, the author made an outline of the first episode. The first episode covered six songs by 5 different artists that contained grandiose words. For each song, the author had touched on five aspects: if the word is used correctly; if the word is suitable with the context; whether the word helped in enhancing the song; if the word complements the song; and whether the word is replaceable. As the target audience for the podcast are ESL learners, the author catered the discussion to fit the educational demand.

As for the second episode, the author focused on idiomatic expressions in song lyrics. The author used 7 examples as a base of discussion from 6 different songs by 6 artists. For this topic, the author touched on five aspects as well. Four of the aspects are similar to the first episode, however, the author changed the question ‘if the word is used correctly’ in the first episode to ‘how the idiomatic expression is used in the song’ for the second episode. The change is made because grandiose words contain definitions that should be specific in use while idiomatic expressions are figurative language that are used based on context.

Even though the podcast is more of an entertainment genre, the author inserts relevant scholarly articles to support their claim. This provides support for the topics discussed and prevents any baseless claims. As both episodes discussed different stylistic devices, the author referred to various academic texts focusing on vocabulary knowledge and ESL learners.

The findings of this project are met through feedback from the podcast and survey answered by the general public.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and findings of this study was derived through an online survey done via Google Form. The survey was separated into three parts: the first part questioned basic information from respondents, the second part asked questions specifically to podcasts, while the third part asked questions regarding pop music as a podcast topic. The survey collected a total of 26 responses. 25 of the respondents were of the age of 18 to 25 and are all students. While the remaining respondent was at the age of 30 to 40 and is a full-time employee. All respondents were able to speak in English and regularly listen to English music. Furthermore, all respondents are knowledgeable at what a podcast is.

#### 3.1: The Effectiveness of Pop Music Podcast Topics for Language Learning

In the second part of the survey, the author asked questions regarding podcasts and whether having pop music podcast topics is effective for language learning. Based on the survey, only 61.5% of respondents which is equivalent to 16 respondents listened to podcasts. 11.5% of them did not listen to podcasts while the remaining 26.9% are vague about the answer.

A common genre of podcast that respondents listen to is entertainment with 40% of response. The horror genre is the second most listened to podcast genre by respondents with 36% responses while 12% of respondents listened to educational genre podcasts. The remaining percentage of respondents answered lifestyle, self care, and none with 4% respondents respectively.

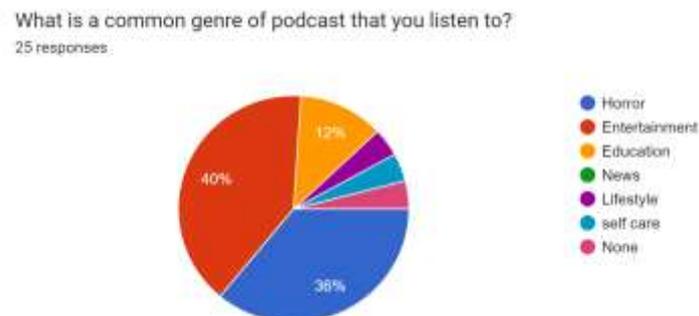


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the percentage for common genre of podcast that respondents listen to

50% of respondents strongly agree that podcasts can be a tool for ESL learners. This is a statement that is supported by Hasan & Hoon (2013) who stated that podcasts can serve as a teaching aid in classrooms. 30.8% of the respondents agree to it while 19.2% were neutral about the question as they neither agree nor disagree.

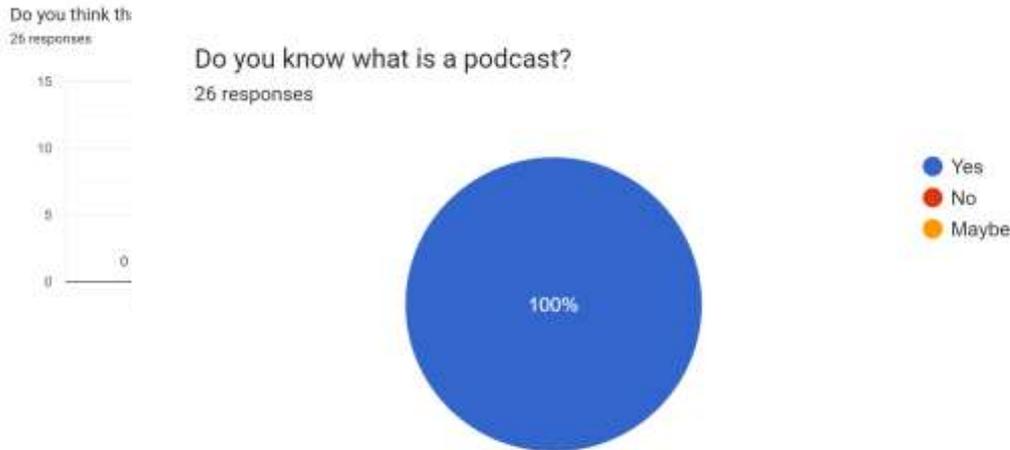


Figure 3: Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents

When asked whether podcast topics for ESL learners should be educational-focused or entertainment-focused, respondents provided mixed opinions. A majority of respondents with 65.4% overall were neutral to the question, which indicates that they believed that podcast topics could either be educational-focused or entertainment-focused. Only 1 respondent strongly agreed that podcasts should be entertainment-focused while 26.9% merely agreed to it. Out of these responses, only 1 respondent answered that podcast topics for ESL learners should be educational-focused.

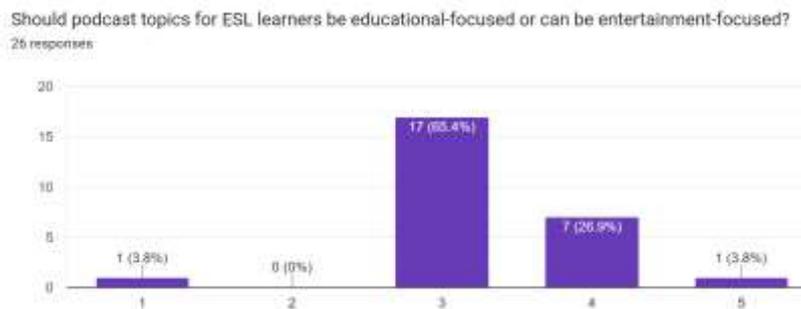


Figure 4: Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents' opinion on podcast topics

Aside from the poll survey, respondents also gave their feedback on pop music as podcast topics. A respondent answered literature, movies, dramas, and music as a suitable podcast topic for ESL learners. One of the respondents reasoned that listeners are more likely to listen to a podcast when the topic is in their interest. Furthermore, a respondent stated that podcast topics regarding songs are suitable for ESL learners as a majority of the public listen to music. The respondent further reiterated that they enjoy listening or watching podcasts where singers explain their songs in detail. It helps them improve their vocabulary and listening skills. Additionally, through the podcast project, a listener mentioned that they find learning language through dissection of song lyrics more enjoyable than listening to regular educational podcasts. The

listener stated that they were able to retain certain words as they listened to the podcast since they were able to identify its usage in conversations.

Moreover, a few of the respondents agreed that a conversational podcast is more beneficial to language learning than an educational podcast where it focuses on teaching the subject. This is because learners can pick up common words to be used in daily conversation. In conjunction with that, listeners will be able to learn the pronunciation of certain words and practice the pronunciation as well as its usage. According to the Podcast Charts by Spotify website, the podcast ‘Let’s Talk with Kaitlin Reagan’ by Kaitlin Reagan is the number one podcast under the education category (2021). This podcast focuses on storytelling and conversational topics but is still ranked number one under the education category without having direct teaching material. This proves that language learners are more inclined to entertainment or conversational podcasts than educational podcasts to aid in their learning.

Based on this observation, it can be concluded that pop music podcast topics can be effective for language learning. This is because the topic encourages ESL learners to listen. This observation is also supported by a research done by Farshi and Mohammadi (2013) who came to the conclusion that podcast listeners are motivated in language learning through the podcast materials. Despite that, podcasts should not be used to replace learning materials such as textbooks or lectures, instead it should be used as a support in language learning (Goldman, 2018).

### 3.2: Analysing Stylistic Aspects of Language in Songs for Improving Language Proficiency

In the third and final part of the survey, respondents answered questions regarding improving language learning through analysing stylistic aspects of language in songs. When asked if listening to English songs help in improving English proficiency, 73.1% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement. 23.1% of the respondents only agreed while the remaining 3.8% was neutral with the statement.

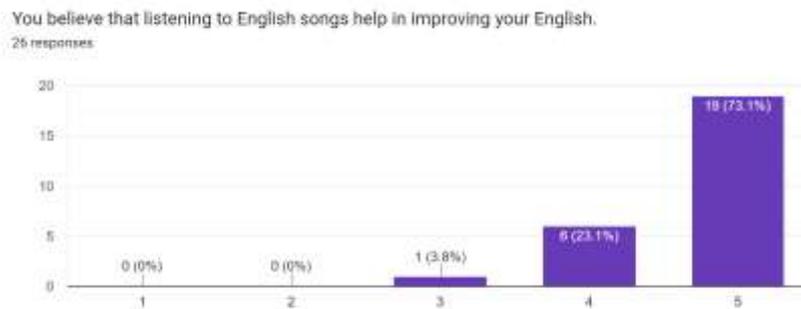


Figure 5: Bar chart showing respondents’ opinion on listening to English songs

A majority of 57.7% of the respondents strongly agree to finding new vocabularies when listening to English songs with only 3.8% of the respondents disagreeing. 7.7% of the respondents were neutral about the statement while 30.8% of the respondents only agreed.

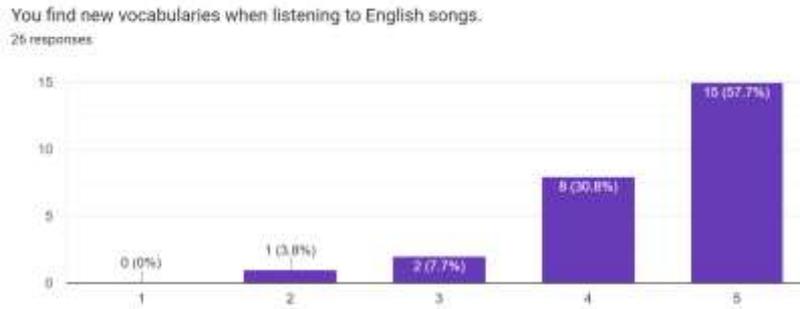


Figure 6: Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents' vocabulary learning

42.3% of the respondents strongly agree to making their own analysis of their favourite English songs with 30.8% of the respondents merely agreeing. 15.4% of the respondents were neutral on the statement while 7.7% and 3.8% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

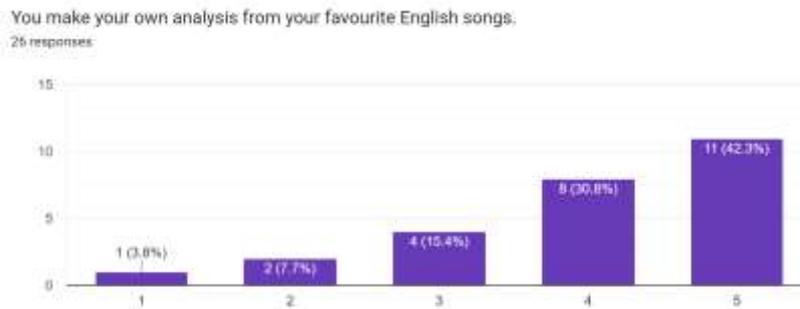


Figure 7: Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents' analysis of English songs

Stylistic aspect of language is a category of language that is typically measured on a formal-informal scale by the speakers. Depending on the topic matter, the target audiences, the mode of discourse (speaking or writing), and the formality of the situation, several linguistic styles are employed (Tarahoran & Pasaribu, 2014). In song lyrics, linguistic styles are usually applied through lexical or semantics. Grandiose words and idiomatic expressions are some of the examples of stylistic aspects of language used in song lyrics.

Based on the survey findings, analysing stylistic aspects of language in song lyrics could improve language proficiency. This is proven in the statement where respondents agreed to finding new vocabulary while listening to English songs. Songs are similar to poetry or storytelling, where the words are arranged so that it flows smoothly and creates a coherent sentence. By using different vocabulary in song lyrics, listeners can learn the meaning and usage of words easily. According to García Conesa and Juan Rubio (2015), it is found that authors agreed that by using original content such as rhymes or songs, it would encourage children to learn foreign languages than using traditional methods (books). Furthermore, it could help in strengthening their grammar and enhance their vocabulary knowledge.

Learners are able to memorise a huge portion of language by using songs as it sticks to the short and long memory (Murphey, 1992). Additionally, Horn (2007) stated that music educates learners in articulation and pronunciation aside from broadening their vocabulary. It is also discovered that the musicality of speech affects EFL students' overall language learning process as well as their ability to pronounce words clearly (Mora, 2000).

Hence, based on this observation and findings, it could be concluded that analysing stylistic aspects of language in song lyrics could help in improving language proficiency. Learners can analyse figurative language in song lyrics to understand the context and meaning of the word choices.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Implementation of pop music podcast topics as an aid to language learning is met with positive feedback. As concluded by Farshi and Mohammadi (2013), the material of podcast topics could motivate learners into using podcasts as a learning tool. Pop music podcast topics attract listeners through the subject of discussion which includes favourite songs, favourite musicians, or trending news. The variety of podcast contents can encourage learners to use podcasts as a tool due to certain materials being applicable for studies (Indahsari, 2020). These contents are inclusive of materials that could be used in daily lives such as pronunciation skills and conversational skills. Additionally, based on the survey conducted, it is safe to conclude that analysing stylistic features of language in song lyrics are effective in improving language proficiency. As mentioned by several authors, the authenticity of song lyrics paired with the rhythmic structure allows learners to understand and memorise vocabularies better. Learners can critically think and discuss the figurative language in song lyrics which expands their language proficiency.

Despite these findings, there is still room for improvement in terms of incorporating pop music or entertainment genre podcasts into language learning tools. As pop music is a broad term, some contents of the project may not cater to the target audience. While having a discussion on stylistic aspects of language in song lyrics receive positive feedback from the podcast listeners, the topic could be too heavy for beginners. One of the improvements suggested is to narrow down the number of songs discussed so that listeners could retain more information. In addition, the author could include more examples of usage for the discussed vocabularies. Another future suggestion is for the author to interact more with the listeners through social media platforms such as Instagram. This would allow the author to understand their audience better. Hence, the author would be able to cater the contents of the podcast to the audience proficiency level and interest. These are some improvements suggested for the future of this project. It is also hoped that more studies could be conducted on this topic to further explore the effectiveness of pop music podcast topics as a language learning tool as well as the competency of analysing stylistic features of language in song lyrics for improving language proficiency.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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